

A Guide to the Use of Greek and Hebrew

by Lester L. Grabbe

What is the first thing which comes to mind when you want to check something in the original Greek or Hebrew of the Bible? The chances are that you will immediately think of *Strong's* and *Young's* concordances.

The belief is widespread among us that these concordances are authorities on the Greek and Hebrew texts — that they are sufficient for any information on the original languages one might need. Yet, have you ever given thought to the original purpose and design of these sources?

Consider what these works are. They are English concordances, *not* lexicons. They are very good for working with the English text. But they were not designed to provide detailed information on Greek and Hebrew usage.

The small lexicons contained in them are of some value for quick reference or for general information. However, one must always remember the limitations of the lexical information in *Strong's* and *Young's*: both are very brief and abbreviated; their information is often years out of date; their definitions usually consist of a few synonyms, often archaic ones straight from the *King James Version*: and far too much emphasis is put on etymology and

“roots.” They were not designed by their authors for in-depth, authoritative, thorough study or research.

The appeal of *Young's* and *Strong's* is simple — they provide handy information for those who do not know Greek and Hebrew. *They were planned for the layman and not the scholar.* Most of you reading this fall into the category of laymen when it comes to Greek and Hebrew. And as laymen, you have certain limitations in trying to work with the original texts. When you know the *proper* sources to go to and how to use them, you will be able to make use of Greek and Hebrew as valuable tools in understanding and expounding the Bible. But never forget your limitations — that your knowledge is generally second-hand — that you are depending on others for your information.

There is a certain psychological factor which makes the use of Greek and Hebrew “proof” appealing. It is easy for one with only a limited knowledge of the subject to assume the “original” Greek or Hebrew says something or proves something it doesn't. Feeling that one's conclusions are correct, one makes a dogmatic statement and even suggests that people “check it for themselves.” This point was certainly brought home in the recent minis-

terial conference. I heard a number of comments about what the "original Greek or Hebrew" said at various passages. Some of these comments were rather amazing — because I just couldn't find the information which was supposed to be there!

If someone with the ability does take the challenge and check up for himself, it can be embarrassing. An incident was related to me where such a thing happened. A minister made a statement about Greek on a visit. The PM was somewhat educated and also a bit sceptical. So he hauled out a copy of the Greek alphabet and asked the minister in question to name the letters, which he was unable to do! (My apologies if the story was related to me inaccurately. But enough similar incidents have happened to underscore the point in any case.)

In addition we have built up a fairly large complex of traditions about what the Greek or Hebrew says in various passages. Most of you have many marginal notes about the Greek or Hebrew. Unfortunately, some of those are simply inaccurate. This was proved by the recent discussions on Pentecost. Many dozens — if not hundreds or thousands — of people had been taught the word "sabbaths" in Lev. 23:15 meant only "week" and not the weekly sabbath. But this was totally false. The same Hebrew word *shabbat* is used throughout the verse.

The conclusions to be drawn are obvious: (1) as a minister in God's Church you have a responsibility to be conscious of your own limitations and to be very careful about drawing dogmatic conclusions from superficial study of a text in Greek or Hebrew; (2) be leery of old marginal notes and old "hand-me-down" traditions about what the original text says at various points.

With these preliminary remarks, we are now ready to give you the proper sources for research and how to use them.

(1) References and Source Books

Certain reference works are considered superior by scholars. They are so regarded because of their merit, not because of any fad or prejudice. Although they are somewhat expensive, many would find them a wise investment, especially if you do not have access to a good local library. You do not have to have formal instruction in the languages to use them. But you *must* know the Greek or Hebrew alphabet. The small effort needed to learn the alphabets is certainly well worth it.

Greek Sources

The best lexicon in English is the Arndt-Gingrich *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, a translation and updating of Bauer's German work

of the same title. It is sometimes even referred to as "Bauer's Lexicon." All who want to use Greek should become familiar with the lexicon.

It contains a wealth of information packed into a small space. But you have to learn how to use it. Because it is so concentrated, it uses a great many abbreviations and symbols. The beginner is likely to be somewhat confused and may be inclined to turn to something a little simpler. Don't give up, though, but take the time to read the introduction and peruse the lists of abbreviations in the front of the lexicon. Look up a few words you already have some knowledge of, reading through the entire entry, and checking all abbreviations you don't understand.

You will be surprised at how much information you have at your fingertips. For example, journal articles are often listed which further discuss a particular word or passage. (You may not have access to the journals or books cited. But many are near a seminary or large university library and could follow up the references if necessary.) In addition, problematic expressions in Scripture are discussed with all the various suggestions, pros and cons, and possibilities for a solution.

Those who do not use Greek very much may not have need of such comprehensive information or may not want to put out the money for a volume of this size. They would probably find an abridged version by one of the authors adequate and much cheaper: *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* by F. W. Gingrich. It still lists all the words of the New Testament with their definitions. But scholarly literature has been cut out, along with citations from secular literature and some of the less significant New Testament passages.

A companion to the large Arndt-Gingrich lexicon is John R. Alsop's *Index to the Arndt and Gingrich Lexicon*. It greatly eases the job of finding the information you want from Arndt-Gingrich. It would be of little value for the small lexicon. But I would recommend it for anyone who has the large Arndt-Gingrich.

Other lexicons can, of course, be helpful. But one should realize that many of them were last revised many years ago. (Thayer's, for example, has not been updated since 1889). So they do not benefit from the mountain of new knowledge found by archaeological and linguistic research in recent decades.

Don't throw Thayer's away if you have a copy, but realize its weaknesses. If you must appeal to an authority, the Arndt-Gingrich lexicon is the one to cite.

Another excellent work is the *Englishman's*

Greek Concordance of the New Testament. It gives the King James translation of every word in the Greek New Testament with some of its context. It thus provides valuable information about the usage of most Greek words. It has Greek to English and English to Greek indices in the back.

Another helpful and indispensable reference for those who have a Greek New Testament and want to work with the Greek text is the *Analytical Greek Lexicon*. It analyzes every Greek form in the New Testament from a grammatical point of view. (One should be aware, however, that its definitions are not always the best or most up-to-date.) And one should never quote it unless he wants to immediately identify himself as a novice! It is better to go to Arndt-Gingrich for definitions.

Hebrew Sources

Most Hebrew lexicons are revisions of the work of the noted William Gesenius. (There are several small lexicons which bear the name Gesenius in one form or another. But they are all out of date and of much less value than the ones about to be listed.) The best comprehensive lexicon in English is still the *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Brown, Driver, Briggs. Like the Arndt-Gingrich, it packs a great deal of information into a small space and likewise requires getting used to in order to tap its resources.

Unfortunately, the Brown, Driver, Briggs lexicon is becoming somewhat out of date, though there is really nothing in English to replace it. However, a new lexicon designed for students has just been published and takes into account more recent scholarship. It is *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* by William Holladay. As the title suggests, it is not so comprehensive as the Brown, Driver, Briggs. But it is up to date, well done, and will probably give as much information as you will ever need. I highly recommend it.

At this point I must give a very brief explanation of a point of Hebrew grammar. Otherwise, you will not be able to use the Hebrew lexicons properly. Hebrew verbs have various forms known as "verbal stems." There are a total of seven of these, though most verbs have only two or three of the possible seven.

These "stems" are important because a word may have a different meaning in one than the other. For example, the verb *bara* means "create" (as in Gen. 1:1) in one stem but "cut" or "cut down" in another. So you have to look up the verb under the correct verbal stem to get the correct meaning.

Fortunately, the *Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament* lists

entries under their proper stems. So if you find the passage you want, you automatically have the correct stem listed for you. The names of the stems are *qal* (sometimes spelled *kal*), *niphal*, *piel*, *pual*, *hiphil*, *hophal*, and *hitpael*. So if a verb in a particular passage occurs in one stem, you must look under that same stem in the lexicon or you might come up with the wrong definition.

It is actually very simple if you use the *Englishman's* concordance. You can also use the *Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, which will give you the same information. But you have no need of this latter source unless you intend to work with an actual text directly in the Hebrew Bible. (The information given above, under "Greek Sources," also applies to the Hebrew versions of the *Englishman's* concordance and the analytical lexicon.)

There are other quite valuable Greek and Hebrew references. But they are best used by someone who has had some formal instruction in the languages.

(2) How to Use the Reference Works

A few examples might give you a better idea of how to make use of the language tools just described.

Suppose you want to do a study of the verb "to love." First of all, you will discover various Greek words used in the King James New Testament where the one English word occurs. An index in the *Englishman's* concordance gives the English words and the Greek words so rendered. (You could also find this information very conveniently in *Young's* concordance; or even *Strong's*, but *Strong's* is harder to use in this respect.)

You will find three Greek words in the Bible are translated by the single English word "love": *thelo*, *agapao* and *phileo*. *Arndt-Gingrich* will show that *thelo* normally has the idea of "wish" or "want." But it occasionally means "take pleasure in, like."

When you compare the two words *agapao* and *phileo* in *Arndt-Gingrich*, you will immediately notice some difference. They are the normal words used for "love," whereas *thelo* is only used a scant few times with this idea. Of these two, *agapao* is used much more frequently than *phileo*. *Agapao* takes up almost a full page while the entry for *phileo* takes up less than a column. (The abridged *Gingrich* lexicon would not show this difference because only a few of the *agapao* references are listed while all those for *phileo* are given. However, a comparison of the two in the *Englishman's* concordance would show the same contrast as the large *Arndt-Gingrich*.)

The shorter *Gingrich* lexicon points out that *agapao* expresses the "finest and most typical

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Christian than" *phileo*. The larger Arndt-Gingrich does not discuss the significance of the two words but instead proves abundant quotes and a breakdown of the various uses of the word in context. It also lists a number of scholarly writings of the two words.

On the other hand, a careful check of the various uses of both Greek words shows they are not uncommonly both used in similar contexts. That is, they are often used synonymously in meaning. So it is important to check the context in any individual passage to see whether the use of one or the other is significant. *Agapao* is used in a number of contexts where it obviously has nothing to do with godly love (see Luke 11:43).

That point should caution you never to draw sweeping conclusions about the use of a particular Greek or Hebrew word in a particular passage. The occurrence of the word could be significant but could also be of no consequence as Greek and Hebrew have loosely used synonyms just as in English. For example, there are more than a dozen words in the Old and New Testaments translated by the one word "prayer." Many of these have similar meanings just as the English words "pray," "ask," "request," etc. Some of them may carry special connotations, though others are used interchangeably. One can only tell for sure if the context makes the meaning of the word exact and explicit.

Now let's consider another example: the word "work." We know the *King James Version* speaks of the "works of the law" and also of being "rewarded according to works." Does the Greek show a definite difference? The *Englishman's* or *Young's* shows five Greek words are translated by "work." However, a check shows the list of really significant words can be shortened to *ergon* and *praxis*. *Praxis* is used in Matthew 16:27 to show that we are rewarded according to our works. However, in other passages such as Revelation 20:13 and 22:12, *ergon* is used for the same expression. *Ergon* is also used in Galatians 3:10 in reference to "works of the law." The Arndt-Gingrich lexicon shows *ergon* is a widely used word with many different meanings, very comparable to our word "work." So its exact meaning must be determined from the context.

One final example is from the Old Testament. In Ezekiel 28:16, the *King James Version* states that the "covering cherub" will be "destroyed." Some leap upon this to show that Satan will eventually be destroyed. The *Englishman's* concordance shows that the word translated "destroyed" is the *piel* stem of the verb 'abad. Look up the word in

Brown, Driver, Briggs or Holladay and you will find that, sure enough, the word normally means "destroy." But it also occurs with the idea of "lose" or "lead aside" or "lead astray" in Jeremiah 23:1 and Ecclesiastes 3:6. From this we learn that Ezekiel 28:16 is not specific in the Hebrew original and must be understood by comparing it with other verses that do make the doctrine clear.

These are only a few brief examples. But maybe they will help illustrate how you can begin to use the tools available. I suggest you first of all carefully follow through these examples yourself in your own books — once you have those you need. Undoubtedly, you will run across puzzling points or things you don't understand. You will very likely find your questions answered by reviewing this article again or by re-reading the introductions, tables of abbreviations, etc., in the references themselves.

But if a bit of study doesn't turn up the answer, chances are that more practice and greater familiarity with your sources will. In the end, the best way to learn to use the tools is by using them!

(3) Researching the Text

The word commonly used by scholars to mean "finding the author's intended meaning of a text," is *exegesis*. It comes from the Greek meaning "lead out." Proper exegesis is very important.

~~##~~ *The Place to Start*

~~##~~ The first and *most vital* principle to keep in mind is this: doctrine is not established on a minute, "atomistic" dissection of Greek and Hebrew words or texts!

As often as not a study of the Greek or Hebrew adds nothing to what can already be found in the Standard English translations. Anything special in the Greek or Hebrew text will usually be brought out in *some* English translation. Don't misunderstand. The Greek or Hebrew should always be checked if possible. But it is *almost never* the sole key.

Doctrine is, of course, established by the plain teachings of clear scriptures on the subject. More than one sect has gone off the deep end by grabbing a vague scripture and making a major doctrine from it. (An example is the Mormon "baptism for the dead," in which one ambiguous statement by Paul is made into a major tenet.)

As an illustration, consider the word *sabbaton* in Matthew 28:1. The fact that this word is the plural form does not, of and by itself, prove there were two Sabbaths on different days in that week. The plural form is often used where only a single sabbath day is meant (for example, Matt. 12:1).

But after we establish what took place from other clear passages (such as John 19:31), the fact that *sabbaton* is plural then takes on some significance and serves as *supporting* evidence. The thing to remember, however, is that the Greek word is the *ending* — not the starting — point. It is the “furthermore,” the “final evidence,” rather than the beginning of the explanation.

Do not negate the value and importance of checking and using the Greek and Hebrew wording. But we need to put this in right perspective. Biblical Greek and Hebrew are living languages just as English is. They, like English, have weak points and strong points, clear expressions and obscure ones, peculiar construction, and unique idioms. Greek and Hebrew are not the “cure-all” of every scriptural difficulty. Other aspects are just as important — and often more important — than the Greek and Hebrew.

Finding the Meaning of a Word

The meaning of a word is determined by its usage, not by an arbitrary decision on the part of a lexicon writer. Good lexicographers base their decisions on a study of biblical and secular literature in the language. Problems arise mainly in connection with rare words or those with theological connotations.

If a word occurs frequently in literature, then you can be fairly sure that the lexicon is right. This is especially true with Greek since a great deal of secular material from New Testament times has been found. But the major source of information for biblical Hebrew must come from the Bible itself since few extra-biblical Hebrew materials have survived. If a Hebrew word is used only a few times in the Old Testament, it may be difficult to determine its exact meaning. So the lexicographer may have to appeal to cognate languages, to tradition or plain guesswork.

This is where the *Englishman's* concordances are helpful. They list every passage where a particular Greek or Hebrew word is used. By studying the use of a word in several passages, you may sometimes learn a great deal. (The Arndt-Gingrich and Brown, Driver, Briggs lexicons also cite all passages where a particular word is used for all but the most frequently used words. This is indicated by a special mark in each case. See the table of abbreviations.)

Hebrew and Greek

As in English, many words have more than one meaning. It is not enough to look down the list of definitions in a lexicon, pick one which fits your particular theory, and then proceed from there.

Just because a word “can mean” something does not prove that it “does mean” that in the verse under question. The particular meaning of a word must be determined from its own context, other passages and idiom. Often lexicons or good commentaries will discuss a difficult passage in reference to Greek or Hebrew idiom. Always do your best to find out what the “experts” have to say before making up your mind about a word or passage. It is always wise to be wary if your study of the Greek or Hebrew text of a passage comes up with a meaning not given in any lexicon, translation or commentary.

Etymology

Etymology — or word origin — can occasionally be a help in finding the meaning of a particular word. But it can also be very tricky. A great deal of caution should be exercised in basing definitions and evidence on etymology. Remember that the Old Testament was written over a period of about a thousand years during which time words changed meaning irrespective of original etymology.

The English word “silly” comes from an old English word which meant “happy.” Etymology would give an inadequate understanding of the meaning of our modern word. And when we speak of the “lousy coffee,” we don't today have in mind an infestation of wee beasties.

The same thing would, of course, apply to *baptizo*. There is no question that the classical word meant “immerse.” But had it come to be used for “sprinkling” or “pouring” by the time of Christ? The current usage of that time must be studied because words change in meaning, sometimes very rapidly. The answer is, it hadn't, as a careful study of the New Testament and contemporary literature shows. But this is a question one must ask and answer. Etymology alone is not enough.

And, of course, there is always the danger of *false* etymology. That is, a word sounds as if it comes from another word but actually does not. For example, the English word “demonstrate” has no connection with the word “demon,” and “catastrophe” has no connection with “astera” (star). A careful check shows that the two words in each case have entirely different origins.

Many old lexicons based too much on etymologies and word roots. This is one of the weaknesses of both *Thayer's* and *Strong's*.

Interlinears and “Literal” Translations

There is hardly such a thing as a “perfect” translation of a passage. Hebrew quotations from

the Old Testament are not even consistently translated into Greek in the New Testament! It is not always possible to bring out all the nuances, shades of meaning, plays on words, special connotations, etc., of the original text when translating it. Attempts to do this must always fall far short of "perfection." Writers and speakers should be aware of this and not place too great a credence in such things as interlinears, "literal" translations (such as the *Concordant* translation), or the *Amplified Bible*.

Actually, one of the most literal translations is the *King James Version*. That is one reason it sounds awkward in many places: it often follows the Greek or Hebrew text almost word for word. And don't assume you come closer to the original by omitting words in italics. These words are often absolutely necessary to show the force of the original. That is why modern translations no longer use italics.

Interlinears can be helpful. But they have the same limitations as any translation. Don't assume their rendering of a particular word is "gospel." For example, the *Englishman's Greek New Testament* (an interlinear which many of you have) "literally" renders the word *epiphoskouse* (Matt. 28:1) as "it was getting dusk." This translation is very appealing — and after all, one might ask, is it not the literal meaning? Yet if you check further, you will find no grounds for so rendering Matthew 28:1, either in the major lexicons or in the usage of the word elsewhere in the New Testament.

The *Amplified Bible* attempts to bring out the "full meaning" of the original by the use of synonyms and paraphrases. But this gets into the matter of *interpretation* instead of just translation. Also the use of several synonyms can be misleading because a word, even if it has several meanings, may have only *one* of them in a particular context. Beware of accepting any novel rendering not confirmed by other translations.

Finally, be aware that the word "mis-translation" has been grossly abused. Actual mis-translations are few and far between. For example, "All things" in Hebrews 2:8 is the most literal rendering of the Greek (*ta panta*). The *Moffatt* translation of "the whole universe" might give a better interpretation according to the context and other scriptures. But "all things" is actually the most exact translation. Usually, you would want to say "a clearer translation is" or "this is better rendered by. . ."

This has been only a very brief exposition of a huge subject — whole books are necessary to cover the same thing in real detail. The *major point* is

this: *be cautious and check any point carefully before coming to a conclusion.*

"A little knowledge can be dangerous." A novice is often dogmatic where an expert would recognize he doesn't know or isn't sure. Most of us are not experts. We depend on others for a great amount of our information.

Remember, it is very easy for a person to pick up *Strong's* concordance (with mind already made up), look down the list of synonyms, pick one which suits a particular idea, zero in on it, and proceed to "prove" a point from the "original" Hebrew or Greek. And, unfortunately, it has been done.

The only *proper* way to approach the subject, though, takes a little more time and effort — but, like anything worth doing, it is worth the price to do it right: use caution, check carefully, and be willing to admit that the facts do not always lead to an unequivocal answer or solution.

Do this and you will be able to use Greek and Hebrew as valuable tools in your Bible study and exposition.

Reference Book List

For a modest sum, you can acquire a very valuable set of books which can greatly extend your effectiveness in Bible study and sermon preparation. I would recommend that the two *Englishman's* concordances come at the top of your list. After that should come the *Arndt-Gingrich* and *Holladay* lexicons and perhaps the *Alsop* index. At current prices this is an investment of about \$75 — only about the price of a Fedco suit!

Alsop, John R. *Index to the Arndt-Gingrich Lexicon.* \$4.95

Analytical Greek Lexicon to the New Testament.
Zondervan, \$4.95

Arndt-Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature.* University of Chicago Press, \$25.00

Brown, Driver & Briggs. *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.*
Oxford University Press, \$25.00

Davidson, Benjamin. *Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon.* Bagster, \$9.95

Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament. Bagster, \$14.95

A Guide to the Use of Bible Commentaries

by Lester L. Grabbe

WHICH commentaries come to mind when you want to find more information on a particular Bible passage? Clarke's Commentary? Jamieson, Fausset and Brown?

As Strong's and Young's concordances were once thought to be *the* reference works for Greek and Hebrew, so many have assumed Clark's and JFB are *the* Bible commentaries to possess, consult, and depend upon.

In actual fact Clark's and JFB are only two of several dozen commentaries available, many of which are much more reliable, up-to-date, and informative. There are linguistic commentaries, theological commentaries, and homiletic (preaching) commentaries. There are one-volume commentaries and multi-volume commentaries. There are so many commentaries you need some sort of guide to pick your way through the forest of them.

Before discussing specific commentaries and commentary series, it is necessary to explain certain principles about commentaries in general.

Commentary Design

Commentaries usually incorporate a number of aims or purposes. But there is generally some overall aim which tends to dominate and distinguish one particular commentary from others. A commentary is usually directed primarily at one of three audiences: the *layman*, the *educated layman*, or the *scholar*. This does not mean an educated layman could not use a commentary aimed primarily at scholars. But he might find it heavy going. Scholarly commentaries usually comment directly on the Greek or Hebrew text while others will generally key off the English translation, even though they may discuss the original text at certain points.

Commentaries for the layman and educated layman (most of our field ministry would fall into the category of educated laymen, since they do not know Greek or Hebrew and are not engaged in scholarly teaching or research) usually try to cover a range of areas, including some discussion

of the text, the original language, historical exegesis, and the theological portent of the passage in question. Some also try to bring in points relating to homiletics. They tend to give a broader overview while avoiding technicalities.

Scholarly commentaries, on the other hand, are most often more specialized and tend to fall into one or the other of the following categories: historical-philological, theological, or literary-critical. Most will include some elements of the others but will be dominated by one of the three major approaches mentioned.

Liberal and Conservative

The reverence with which the Bible is approached varies widely among the various commentators. There are many *conservative* commentaries (especially the older ones) which view the Bible as the inspired word of God much as we do. Their treatment of the text will generally be more compatible to our way of thinking. Thus our natural tendency to gravitate toward this type of commentary.

However, we can miss a great deal of good solid information if we stick solely to conservative commentators and ignore the contributions of liberal scholarship. True, the lack of respect which many liberal commentators exhibit toward the Bible will immediately put us off. But this approach is not generally because of a malicious desire to tear down the Bible (there are exceptions to this, unfortunately). They simply treat the Bible as they would any human literature — whether Plato, Herodotus, Shakespeare, or James Joyce.

But this seeming irreverence can also be of great help because liberal scholars tend to be less denominationally prejudiced than conservatives. Conservatives often think they are being loyal to the Bible when in actuality they are only being loyal to their particular Protestant tradition! Thus, a liberal scholar may in the end come closer to the true meaning of the biblical text — despite his different view of inspiration — simply because

he isn't so likely to be working from a sectarian bias.

Naturally, the terms "liberal" and "conservative" present too neat a division. In the real world of scholarship, views range all the way from radical, through liberal, moderate, moderately conservative, to evangelical. (The really extreme sects such as the Pentecostals and the JW's are excluded from the term "scholarship" by nearly everyone.) German scholarship tends to fall into the liberal and radical side of things. British scholarship on the other hand most often falls into the moderate or moderately conservative range. A number of very respected British scholars are even evangelicals (F. F. Bruce, for example).

American scholarship is quite diversified. There is a very strong evangelical segment (of which Fuller Seminary would be an example). Unfortunately, the American evangelical scholars tend to work within their own circles rather than contributing to the scholarly community as a whole. That's why evangelicals tend to have a bad name among liberal scholars. A moderate wing of Old Testament research is represented by the Albright school. German scholarship is presently having a great impact in this country and will continue to do so for some time to come. For this reason, American biblical scholarship tends to be dominated by the liberal theologians.

The past few paragraphs may seem to be a wide digression from the subject of commentaries. Not so. This overview of some aspects of scholarship is necessary in order to help you evaluate different commentaries, especially new ones which may not be directly covered in this article. The important thing is not to reject automatically a commentary because it accepts the Documentary Hypothesis or the non-Pauline authorship of the Pastoral epistles. There may still be a lot of good information despite such obvious defects.

What about the label "Roman Catholic"? Traditional Catholic scholarship of past years has been heavily dominated by the Catholic religion. But liberal Catholic scholarship of today differs little from liberal Protestant or even liberal Jewish scholarly research. In fact, as one leading Jewish scholar said, "There is no longer any such thing as Protestant scholarship or Catholic scholarship or Jewish scholarship. There is only scholarship — good, bad, or indifferent." Recent Catholic scholarly publications have some very good solid material for a technical understanding of the Bible.

A final note about commentators. No scholar is an expert in every area of biblical research, and no real scholar would attempt to present himself as

such. A scholar naturally knows more about his particular specialty than that of others. This means one-man commentaries almost always lack the depth and quality of those with multiple authorship. While a one-man commentary might be very helpful from a general point of view, realize the need to go to the specialists on those occasions when you need more depth and expertise.

One-Volume Commentaries Versus Commentary Sets

The first question about commentaries almost everyone will ask is, "Which commentary is the best so I can buy that one and forget about the rest?" As the comments made so far already indicate, there is no proper answer to this oversimplified question. There is probably no "best" commentary for you. Even if there is, you can probably be sure it will not be so complete and reliable as to obviate the need of consulting any others.

This state of things is probably just as well. If there was one superior commentary which we could recommend as *the* commentary to have, it could have very bad effects. The tendency would be for readers to accept it at face value without giving its comments the critical evaluation they should have. You would also easily become dominated by the thinking of the one commentator and would not receive the stimulation of different approaches and ways of seeing things.

In the final analysis the commentary or commentaries for you depend on your personal needs. Your needs for preaching are different from my needs for teaching or research. The commentaries on my shelves may not belong on yours. And there's always the question of "bread" — commentaries cost money, sometimes a great deal of money.

If you aren't used to using commentaries, your first buy is logically a one-volume commentary. A good one-volume commentary usually costs only a little more than a single volume of a multi-volume commentary. You might also find a one-volume commentary useful while trying to build up your library with commentary volumes on individual books. But in the end a one-volume commentary is too skimpy to serve all your needs.

On the other hand, it is *almost always unwise to buy a commentary set*. The reason is that sets usually vary greatly from book to book. For example, the Isaiah volume of a particular series may be excellent while the Hebrews volume is utter trash. Seldom does a ~~multi-volume~~ ^{volume} commentary maintain a high level of competence and value

throughout (exceptions will be noted below). Yet most multi-volume commentaries can be purchased on an individual volume basis. So the best thing is to find what are the best commentaries for the individual books and then buy them separately, regardless of what set they belong to.

Also many good one-book commentaries exist which do not belong to any set.

Evaluation of Different Commentaries

Since the list which follows is rather extensive, I will give the approximate price with each one rather than giving a separate list at the end of the article. For the commentary sets, the individual volumes generally vary quite a bit, depending on the size of the book. So only an approximation of the price can be given; some volumes may not fall within this range.

Descriptions will vary slightly from one another. But I will try to include information on the following points: range of treatment (general, linguistic, homiletic), level of scholarship (scholar, educated layman, layman), stance (liberal, moderate, conservative), and how up-to-date (approximate age). If nothing is said about range, then it's probably quite general; if nothing about age, it's fairly recent.

One-Volume Commentaries

The New Bible Commentary, Revised, \$12.50. Evangelical. Done by a number of different scholars, mostly British. Quite suited for the layman or educated layman. Most of you would probably find it the most helpful of the one-volume commentaries.

Wycliffe Bible Commentary, \$12.50. Evangelical. Several scholars, mostly American. Somewhat similar to the New Bible Commentary but the other seems to have the edge of quality.

Peake's Commentary on the Bible, \$19.50. Moderate. Several well-known scholars (mostly British), including some conservative ones. Doesn't always have a verse-by-verse commentary, but very good background material to the different books and their individual difficulties.

Jerome Biblical Commentary, \$30.00. Liberal. Roman Catholic scholars (but note comments above about RCC scholarship). Some very good background essays.

Multi-Volume Commentaries — Whole Bible

New International Commentary, \$5.00-\$10.00 per volume. Evangelical, mainly British authors. New Testament is almost complete but only the book of Isaiah is available for the Old Testament. Educated layman. Uses the Revised Version for

the text but gives some technical comments on the original languages. Readable and generally helpful exegesis.

Tyndale Bible Commentary, \$2.25-\$4.00, paperback edition. Evangelical, mainly British authors. Most of the Bible is complete. Somewhat similar to the New International, but more for the layman. Many would find it too nontechnical, but it might be good for someone looking for sermon material.

New Century Commentary, \$8.00-\$12.00 vol. Moderate. Mostly British scholarship. For the layman and educated layman. Somewhat like Harper's New Testament Commentary listed later on. Based on the RSV text.

Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, now out of print. Moderately liberal. British effort. Technical language held to a minimum but a lot of value despite the small size of the volumes. Try secondhand book shops since they are no longer in print. The volumes may be anywhere from 70-150 years old so realize their information may be out-of-date.

Anchor Bible, \$6.00-\$8.00. Liberal. International scholars, though more heavily American. Supposedly for laymen as well as scholars but not always so in actual fact. Very uneven. Some very good volumes (Genesis, writings of John, Job) and some to avoid (such as Psalms). Don't buy a volume until you have had a chance to look it over.

Interpreter's Bible, \$8.75 vol., 12-vol. set (several books to each vol.). Liberal. International scholars. Supposedly designed for the preacher. Has an exegetical section and then a separate homiletic section. But the printing wastes a lot of space which adds to the expense.

International Critical Commentary (ICC), \$5.00-\$9.00 vol. if ordered from Britain; \$13.00-\$15.00 vol. through an American distributor. Liberal. Designed for the scholar though the educated layman can also get a lot of good out of it. Almost all of the volumes are of excellent quality. This is the commentary to go to for technical information. Its critical approach may put you off initially. But almost all of the commentators were outstanding scholars and knew what they were talking about from a technical, scholarly point of view. Unfortunately, it has never been completely finished and most of the volumes are about 50-75 years old. But there is nothing in English to replace it as yet (except for some commentaries on individual books of the Bible).

Hermeneia, \$12.00-\$15.00. Liberal. Designed for scholars though educated laymen can use it. Once it is finished it will probably replace the ICC just

discussed. But it has only begun for the New Testament and the first Old Testament volume will probably be out only later this year. Thus far, good for technical information and the trends of modern biblical scholarship.

Speaker's Bible Commentary, out of print. Moderately liberal. British scholarship. Almost a century old. A lot of good general information if you can find a copy. Designed for the educated layman.

Cambridge Bible Commentary, paperback \$2.50-\$5.00. Moderate. Based on the New English Bible translation. Aimed at the layman and educated layman. Some extra volumes give good background information. But the commentaries themselves are rather skimpy.

Lange's, out of print. Seems aimed primarily at the preacher. Has some technical material, though not too much plus some specifically homiletic material, often verbose. Its major drawback is age — a century old.

Broadman Bible Commentary, \$7.50 vol., 12-vol. set. Conservative. Southern Baptist effort. More for layman than anyone else.

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown. This needs no introduction since you are all familiar with it. But it does need a conclusion: don't rely on it! It was originally designed for the layman and is now over a century old. The men who wrote it were reasonable scholars in their own time. But this particular commentary did not represent the best scholarly efforts of its own time, much less those of today. Don't throw it away if you have a copy, but use it with care (and large quantities of salt).

Clarke's. Actually, Clarke seems to have been a better scholar in his own day than were the JFB trio in theirs. However, Clarke lived about half a century even before they did. So he is over a century and a half out-of-date, especially so in areas relating to the natural sciences. He also represents a one-man work which has its drawbacks as already noted. Ditto about using with caution and care.

Multi-Volume Commentaries — Old Testament (alone)

Keil and Delitzsch, \$8.00-\$10.00 vol. for the new 10 vol. set. Conservative. Designed for the educated layman. Good comments on Hebrew text. Probably the best all around on the Old Testament for the preacher. But remember it is getting toward its centenary. A few things have been learned since it was written. The new edition in 10 volumes can be obtained for about \$60.00 from the Religious Book Discount House.

Soncino Books of the Bible, \$5.00-\$10.75. Con-

servative Jewish, designed for laymen. Some of the volumes much better than others. Somewhat expensive for the amount of material actually given (about half the space is devoted to printing the Hebrew text and the JPS translation). With an exception or two (such as the volume on Proverbs), there is comparatively little technical information given, either on the historical background or on the Hebrew text. But you might find it has some good material for use in preparing sermons.

Old Testament Library, \$10.00-\$15.00 vol. Liberal. Designed for the educated laymen but mainly oriented toward literary and form criticism. Some exceptions which you might find useful are the volumes on Proverbs, Psalms, and I and II Kings. Somewhat expensive.

Multi-Volume Commentaries — New Testament (alone)

Harper's New Testament Commentaries (Black's... in England), \$5.00-\$8.00 vol. Also available in a paperbacked edition from England. Moderate. Mostly British scholars. Good general coverage in non-technical language. For the layman or educated layman. About the same level and format as the New Century Commentary.

Moffatt New Testament Commentary, out of print. Liberal. Different authors. Based on the Moffatt translation. Clear and understandable language on the whole. For the educated layman.

Lenski's Interpretation of..., \$6.50-\$8.50. Moderate. One-man work. Lutheran theology sometimes shines through. A great deal of comment on the Greek text (he gives his own translation), but he seems too dominated by A. T. Robertson's grammar which is now somewhat out-of-date. His exegesis seems to me to be too hair-splitting at times. But he can also put things in just the right way at other times. Done in the 1930's.

Building a Library

We have already pointed out the hazards of buying a commentary set. You should buy according to the value of the individual book. But as you well know — or would certainly learn in a hurry! — commentaries are expensive. You want your commentary dollar to buy as much value as possible.

The first thing to consider are your needs. As a field minister you are primarily interested in what will help you speak to your church and only secondarily interested in technical detail for your own sake. So homiletic interests will usually dominate your choice of commentaries.

Yet never forget an important point: *you can't expound a scripture until you first understand it*

yourself. This means you will want a commentary which gives reasonable exegetical guidance as well as homiletic material. It's no good keeping the audience's interest if you are using erroneous information to do so. Technical accuracy is not to be ignored even though it might not be your number one concern.

Most of the commentaries designed for the educated layman will give you plenty of homiletic material as well as a readable exegesis. So most of you will find more of what you need in commentaries designed for educated laymen. But a great deal depends on your own personal education and your individual interests. One person may happen to like a particular commentary series or commentator which leaves the next man cold. The major concern is that the commentary be helpful to you and accurate for the area in which you wish to use it.

I would first suggest investment in a good one-volume commentary. The majority of ministers would probably like best the *New Bible Commentary, Revised*. But some might prefer some of the others listed.

After that, you will probably find it easiest to buy volumes for individual books as you happen to be studying them. It is always best to use a volume awhile before deciding to buy it. Borrow a copy from a library and use it in your private study for a time if possible. At least give it a careful perusal in the bookstore before putting cash down for it.

Though I somewhat hesitate to give specific recommendations to field ministers, I think most of you will find the *New International Commentary* helpful for most of the New Testament. It is conservative, readable, and yet also generally sound from a technical point of view.

The *Harper's and New Century Commentary* should also be quite helpful though less conservative than the NIC. The *Tyndale Bible Commentary* has a little less substance than the three just mentioned. But it has the advantage of being very cheap as well as of good quality.

For the Old Testament alone, the Keil-Delitzsch commentary would probably still be at the head of the list despite its age. The new reprint in 10 volumes can be obtained for as low as \$60.00 for the entire Old Testament. Or you could buy the individual volumes separately. Some used-book shops might have volumes from earlier reprints.

You might run across other useful commentaries not listed here. There are many older commentaries I am not familiar with plus a few modern one-man commentaries. If you find one you like for a good price, fine. But always be careful to see it is really as good as it appears to be.

Parting Advice

The *best* commentary is the one which serves your needs — so long as it is accurate. So be sure to examine before buying. Don't buy solely on someone else's recommendation. His needs and interests may be different from yours.

This article is not something to be memorized. It's a guide — to be read, reviewed, and hopefully consulted when you are in the market for a commentary. It is not an end in itself. Its purpose is to help you in making use of tools which can add new depth to your Bible understanding — if used judiciously, armed with the doctrines of *God's Church* and led by His Holy Spirit. □

Guide to the Use of Bible Study Aids

by Lester L. Grabbe

IN TWO previous articles we have already discussed commentaries and aids to getting at the original Greek and Hebrew of the Bible. This article considers other books which can assist in gaining a deeper understanding of God's Word.

The Bible was not written in a vacuum. It did not fall in a hermetically sealed package from heaven. Neither ancient Israel nor the early Church lived out their histories in air-conditioned, bacteria-free, sterile plastic capsules cut off from the rest of the world.

The environment of the Old Testament was the Mediterranean world of the ancient Near East. The New Testament grew up in Hellenistic Palestine, a part of the Roman Empire and the larger Hellenistic world. Each set of peoples — and their respective literatures — were influenced by their surroundings and imbibed of the contemporary culture. Just as the Worldwide Church of God is at home in a 20th century world, so were the writers of the Bible a part of the society of their time.

Once we understand this, we see why a knowledge of *the background of the Bible* and the cultures in which it arose is absolutely *vital* to a proper understanding of it. There are many sources which can give us this valuable background.

This article will not generally repeat information found in the two previous articles. For guidance to sources of information on the Greek and Hebrew texts, see the first article in this series. Lexicons and concordances are listed there. Commentaries receive treatment in the second article. Terms such as "liberal," "conservative," and "educated layman" are discussed in the commentary as well and will not be redefined here.

Dictionaries

Multi-volume

Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 4 vols., \$45. This is the most complete and up-to-date set in English. A supplementary volume is already

planned to come out in a couple of years. As well as containing good articles by various internationally known scholars, it usually lists helpful bibliographical material at the end of each article. It is well worth the investment.

Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible, 5 vols., \$30. Although about 75 years old now, Hasting's still has much useful information. If you can afford it — or especially if you can find a cheap used edition — it is a good supplement to the IDB just listed. The HDB occasionally even gives a fuller treatment of a particular subject than IDB, especially when little advance has been made in knowledge of the subject during the intervening years.

One-volume

New Bible Dictionary, \$13. This is probably the best single-volume dictionary. Conservative. Bibliographies at the end of most entries. Many different scholars.

Hasting's One Volume Bible Dictionary, ed. Grant and Rowley, \$17.50. Moderate. Up to date but lacks bibliographical material.

Unger's Bible Dictionary, \$12.00. Conservative. One man effort which gives it certain weaknesses. Shouldn't be your first choice or the only one you use. If you use it, be sure to compare it with others.

Encyclopaedia Biblica, out of print. This is about the same age as the HDB mentioned earlier. Originally issued in four volumes, it was later printed as one. Much useful information if you can find an old copy. Liberal scholarship on the whole.

Introductions

Bible introductions are very useful for giving background information about the text, geography, history, and extra-biblical literature to help you understand the Bible. Many of you are already familiar with some older introductions such as the Angus-Green handbook and *Halley's Bible Handbook*. But they are old, out of date and sometimes very inaccurate and unscholarly. (Hal-

ley's quality is so poor, it is hardly fit to grace the shelf of an Ambassador College graduate!) Most modern introductions cover only one of the Testaments. Since most of them have very similar titles (*Introduction to . . .*), I will list them by author only.

Old Testament

R. K. Harrison, \$13. This is the best conservative introduction. It is pretty good on the whole, though having some deficiencies since Harrison is a younger scholar and doesn't have the experience of some. It is well worth the money and would give a lot of good information for Bible studies.

Otto Eissfeldt, \$11.00. This is one of the best liberal introductions and gives copious bibliographical material. Eissfeldt was one of those "giants" among scholars that don't happen along everyday. If you can discipline yourself to wade through his discussion, you will come up with a lot of meaty knowledge. If nothing else, it will show how much there is in your Old Testament that you still don't know!

Georg Fohrer, \$9.50. Liberal, though thinner than Eissfeldt and not quite his match for scholarship. Good bibliographical material. It would be good to use this to temper Harrison (if you don't feel up to Eissfeldt).

New Testament

Donald Guthrie, \$12.00. Good, solid, readable, conservative introduction. It should find a place beside Harrison on your shelf (its quality actually seems above that of Harrison). Pretty good bibliographical information, though scattered through each chapter rather than given systematically.

W. G. Kuemmel, \$7.50. Standard liberal introduction. Good bibliographical information. Not as readable as Guthrie, but not bad. Storehouse of information in convenient form.

Robert Grant, \$4.00. (paperback). Moderate. Quite readable, though not as much information as the two just listed above.

Harmonies

Two major sections of the Bible which have parallel accounts are the Old Testament books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles and the Gospels in the New Testament.

W. D. Crockett, *A Harmony of the Books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles*, \$5.00. This uses the text of the Revised Version of 1884 (very similar to the KJV). His footnotes tell you why he places certain things in a certain order. Very useful for studying the history of Israel in the monarchy.

Synopsis of the Four Gospels, ed. Kurt Aland,

\$13.50 if ordered directly from the American Bible Society. The best available harmony and well worth the money. A harmony of the Greek text is on the left-hand page and a parallel harmony in modern English on the right (RSV text with readings from other English translations). Not just the corresponding sections, but even corresponding sentences and phrases are carefully delineated. The problem with most English harmonies (such as Robertson's) is that they show only parallel blocks of material. This may distort the actual picture. But when the specific sections and even short phrases are placed side by side, the overall picture becomes much sharper.

Frank J. Goodwin, *A Harmony of the Life of St. Paul*, \$4.00. This is an attempt to present a chronological account of Paul's life by harmonizing the Acts of the Apostles with selections from the Pauline Epistles. It is useful for studying the epistles, though the dates are not always accurate, and the general scholarship is out of date. It does not have the full text of Paul's letters and omits Hebrews entirely.

Geography

The geography of Palestine and the Mediterranean world is too often neglected. You miss a great deal if you read about events in the Bible without knowing where they took place or what the geographical setting was. There are many good geographies and atlases. I will mention only one inexpensive atlas plus two other works.

Oxford Bible Atlas, ed. H. G. May, \$2.50 (paperback). This is a good overall atlas at a reasonable price. There is a wealth of maps of the whole Mediterranean world plus helpful discussion of the historical geography.

G. A. Smith, *Historical Geography of the Holy Land . . .*, \$7.50 (the paperback edition is unfortunately out of print). Although slightly outdated at a few points, it is still one of the most usable works around. Its main lack is maps since it has only a few pages of line-drawing maps at the back. It also covers only Palestine.

Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, \$8.00. This is the most up-to-date historical geography. It covers the land and its history from prehistoric times to Ezra and Nehemiah.

Archaeology

This is a whole field of study in itself. Only a couple of the books more suited to the educated layman will be given here.

G. E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, \$12.50 (abridged paperback edition for \$2.25). A readable

introductory work by a well-known American archaeologist. It has some material on the New Testament, though mostly confined to the Old.

W. F. Albright, *Archaeology of Palestine*, \$5.50 (paperback). A good, inexpensive, useful introduction to the archaeology of Palestine before and during Israelite times.

A. Negev ed. *Archaeological Encyclopaedia of the Holy Land*, \$16. This may be a bit expensive for those wanting only a brief discussion of archaeology. But it has a wealth of information especially for the Old Testament and is well worth the price for those who are more serious about the subject. It is listed by topic rather than being in narrative style.

Jack Finegan, *The Archeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church*, \$20. A rather expensive, but exceptionally useful introduction to the archaeology of Jerusalem, Palestine and areas relating to early New Testament Church history.

Background Books

There are many books which cover the general background of the history, literature, or useful background material to one or the other of the Testaments.

The Cambridge Bible Commentary has a number of introductory and background-type volumes in its series. These are all available in paperback and usually cost less than \$5 each. Here are some other items:

Old Testament

M. Noth, *Old Testament World*, \$9.00. This book by a leading German Old Testament scholar has good introductory material on the geography, archaeology, history and text of the Old Testament.

Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures, ed. J. Pritchard, \$4.00 (paperback). This gives in translation the most important documents of the Ancient Near East which bear on the Old Testament. For example, the Assyrian records which mention Israelite kings are given.

Documents from Old Testament Times, ed. D. W. Thomas, \$2.00 (paperback). Similar to the work just listed, it sometimes gives a better background explanation than Pritchard. Either one is helpful. The two together supplement one another.

New Testament

F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, \$4.00 (paperback). This is a very readable volume by a

leading conservative British scholar. It gives the background history leading up to the New Testament, then gives the New Testament material in historical form supplemented with a great deal of extra-biblical material.

New Testament Background: Selected Documents, ed. C. K. Barrett, \$2.25 (paperback). A translation of the major extra-biblical literature which throws light on the New Testament. Each document has a brief introduction and usually a discussion of any problem which the document helps to solve.

E. Schuerer, *Jewish People in the Time of Jesus*. This work has been out of print for a long time. Recently extracts have been published in two paperbacked volumes by Schocken Books, one on the history for \$2.50 and one on the literature for \$4.50. But just this year the first volume of a new edition (edited by G. Vermes) has come out (cost for vol. 1 is \$25). While designed primarily for the scholar, anyone who wants accurate information on the history and literature of the Jews in Jesus' day can find it here. You may be able to find the old edition in some libraries and many will, of course, be acquiring the new edition.

A. Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, \$10.00. While this is not too expensive and has much useful information, you should be very careful with it. Not only was Edersheim not always the best of scholars, but as a converted Jew he often let his pro-Christian missionary zeal distort his description and evaluation of Judaism and the Jewish literature. He should be checked against someone like Schuerer if possible.

Bibliographical Guides

As is obvious by now, I have only scratched the surface in describing useful books for a better understanding of the Bible. Many of you may want further guidance about particular books you run across. Others may have interests in areas not touched on here or want to go beyond what I have listed. This is where a knowledge of bibliographical guides can be of help.

F. W. Danker, *Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study*, \$6.25. This is a thorough but inexpensive guide to books for help in Bible study. It will probably have most of what you will ever need and then some. At times he may evaluate some works differently than others would. But on the whole he is very useful and well worth the money.

D. M. Scholer, *A Basic Bibliographic Guide for New Testament Exegesis*, \$2.25 (paperback). This gives a slightly larger listing than Danker, at least
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in some areas. But it covers only the New Testament and sometimes gives only brief annotations. You could use it to supplement Danker, but may find it difficult to use on its own.

Essential Books for a Pastor's Library, published by the faculty of Union Theological Seminary, \$3.00. While *their* idea of essential books may not be your idea, the guidance given in this book is quite helpful. Each work is accompanied by a brief annotation. This will allow you to decide the value of the book. It's useful by itself and a good supplement to Danker. □