How to do a Word Study
Bernard Bell, rev. September 2015

Example word: Bless

The purpose of a word study is to find what a particular word means in its particular context, and thus arrive at a fuller understanding of the text.

OT: “bless” is used three times in Gen 1:1–2:3—in 1:22, 28; 2:3.
NT: “bless” or a cognate is used three times in Eph 1:3.

Finding the Word

Numbering Systems

Most concordances and many other works are keyed to one of two numbering systems:

1. **Strong’s (S):** James Strong (1822-1894) assigned numbers to every Hebrew/Aramaic word (1–8674) in the Hebrew Bible, and to every Greek word (1–5624) in the Textus Receptus (the Received Text) of the Greek New Testament. His Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the KJV was first published in 1890.

2. **Goodrick/Kohlenberger (G/K):** Edward Goodrick and John Kohlenberger developed a new numbering system which more accurately reflects the current understanding of the original languages. Hebrew and Aramaic words are numbered separately: Hebrew 1–9597, Aramaic 10001–10779. G/K numbers were first used in the *Zondervan NIV Exhaustive Concordance*, and have been adopted for many other reference tools, especially those published by Zondervan. Most of the tools that use G/K numbering include an index for converting to/from Strong’s numbering.

Concordance

An English concordance lists the Biblical uses of English words in a particular translation. A Concise concordance lists only a selection of the occurrences (those deemed to be most significant) and covers only a selection of the words. An Exhaustive Concordance lists all uses of all words (except for such common words as “and,” “the,” etc.). Exhaustive Concordances are available for many English versions including KJV, NASB, NIV, NRSV, NLT.

**Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance.** Public domain, available from many publishers. KJV keyed to Strong’s.


Consulting the *NAS Exhaustive Concordance* (Holman, pp 157-158), we find separate listings for five different English words: bless, blessed, blesses, blessing, blessings.

Next to each entry is the Strong’s number, regular face for Hebrew/Aramaic, italics for Greek. In many cases, a
particular English word renders several different Hebrew or Greek words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OT</th>
<th>NT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bless</td>
<td>122×: 1288×119, 833×1, 3190×1</td>
<td>2127×9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blessed</td>
<td>224×: 1288×171, 1289×4, 1293×2; 833×6, 835×36</td>
<td>84×: 2127×25, 2128×8, 3106×2, 3107×47, 1757×2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blesses</td>
<td>1288×11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blessing</td>
<td>51×: 1288×3, 1293×48</td>
<td>20×: 2127×4, 2129×11, 2721×1, 3108×3, 5485×1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blessings</td>
<td>1293×11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NASB uses "blessed" 224× in OT and 84× in NT, but this one English word is used to render five different Hebrew and five different Greek words (H833, 835, 1288, 1289, 1293; G1757, 2127, 2128, 3106, 3107).

1. OT: The Strong’s number for the verb "bless" in Genesis is 1288, but note how often 833 or 835 is used, e.g. in Psalm 1:1 ("Blessed is the man...").

2. NT: In Eph 1:3, three different Greek words are used: 2127, 2128 (both translated “bless”), 2129 (“blessing”).

At the back of the Concordance is a complete listing of all Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek words, listed by Strong’s number. Each entry lists the different ways the Hebrew or Greek word is translated into English, in this case in NASB. After the Hebrew word, the number in square brackets (e.g. 1288…[138c]) indicates the page and quadrant (imagining the page divided into four quadrants) in BDB, a standard Hebrew lexicon.

1288. ברק barak [138c]; a prim. root: to kneel, bless.—abundantly bless(1), actually bless(1), blessed(1), bless(116), blessed(171), blesses(10), blessing(1), boast(m)(1), congratulate(1), curse (3), cursed(3), curses(1), greatly bless(1), greet (2), greeted(1), had to bless(1), kneel(1), kneel down(1), knelt(1), persisting in blessing(1), pronounce blessing(1), salute(1), salutes(1), surely bless(1), (thanked)(1).

1289. ברק berak [1085b]; (Ara.) corr. to 1288; to kneel, bless.—blessed(4), kneeling(1).

1290. ברק berk [139c]; from 1288: the knee.—feeble(1), kneel(1), kneeled(1), knees* (1), knees(20), lapt(m)(1).

1291. ברק berak [1085c]; (Ara.) corr. to 1290; the knee.—kneels(1).

1292. ברק Barakel [140a]; from 1288 and 410; “El does bless,” the father of one of Job’s friends.—Barachel(2).

1293. ברק berakah [139c]; from 1288; a blessing.—benefit(1), blessed(1), blessing(48), blessings(11), generous(m)(1), gift(m)(3), most blessed(1), peace(2), present(m)(1).

1294. ברקה Berakah [139d]; from 1288; an Isr. also a valley in Judah.—Barakah(3).

1295. ברקה berekah [140a]; from 1288; a pool, pond.—pond(1), pool(13), Pool(2), pools (1).

1296. ברק Berekyah or ברי היי Berekyahu [140a]; from 1288 and 3050, see 3000; “Yah blesses,” the name of several Isr.—Berechiah(1).

2127. εὐλογεῖν eulogein: from 2095 and 3056; to speak well of, praise.—bless(8), blessed(25), blessing(3), giving a blessing(1), praise(1), prais ing(1), surely bless*(1).

2128. εὐλογητὸς eulogētos: from 2127; well spoken of, i.e. blessed.—blessed(7), Blessed(1).

2129. εὐλογία eulogia: from the same as 2127; praise, blessing.—blessing(11), bountiful(2), bountifully(2), flattering speech(1), gift(m)(2).

Reverse Concordance

A reverse concordance lists, in English, all the verses where a particular Hebrew or Greek word appears. The model for these concordances are the Englishman’s Concordances produced by George V. Wigram. Especially helpful are the editions prepared by Jay P. Green, in which he has added cross-references to other books. John Kohlenberger and
colleagues have prepared new concordances in the Englishman’s tradition.


**Bible Software**

Nowadays, Bible software will provide all the features of a concordance more easily and often more cheaply.

**Lexicons**

A lexicon is a dictionary of words, giving a definition for each word.

**Hebrew Lexicons**

**BDB**


For a long time the standard Hebrew lexicon has been BDB: *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, by Francis Brown with the cooperation of S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, based upon the *Lexicon of Wilhelm Gesenius* (1842). Especially helpful is the version prepared by Jay P. Green, in which he has added Strong’s numbers. Bruce Einspahr’s *Index* lists by verse number every verse reference in BDB. This index shows that Gen 1:22, 28; 2:3 are mentioned on page 139a of BDB, in sections 2a, 2b (each page of BDB is imagined as divided into four quadrants a–d).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ch</th>
<th>v.</th>
<th>Heb</th>
<th>Eng</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Sec</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>ברכ</td>
<td>BLESS</td>
<td>139a</td>
<td>2a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>ברכ</td>
<td>BLESS</td>
<td>139a</td>
<td>2a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>ברכ</td>
<td>BLESS</td>
<td>139a</td>
<td>2b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Turning to BDB, we find:

2. God blesses a. men: …Gn 1:22, 28; b. things: sabbath Gn 2:3 …

BDB is not recommended for those not knowing Hebrew.

**KBL**

The standard lexicons used by Hebrew scholars are those prepared by Ludwig Koehler (d. 1956) and Walter
Word Studies

Baumgartner (d. 1970) and their successors:


The first two editions of the K-B Lexicon (KBL) gave both German and English renderings. The third edition of KBL (KBL³) gave only English; it was two-thirds complete when Baumgartner died. William Holladay made the essence of KBL available in English. J. J. Stamm revised the work of K-B to produce The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (HALOT), which is now the academic standard.

KBL, HALOT and Holladay are organized by Hebrew word, and not readily accessible to one who doesn't know Hebrew. Furthermore, KBL and HALOT are very expensive.

Holladay (p. 49) gives four meanings for רָבָא in the piel stem:
2. bless = declare a person endowed w. power for success, prosperity, fertility
3. bless = wish s.o. one power for success, prosperity, fertility
4. bless God = declare God the origin of power for success, prosperity, fertility = praise God

Greek

BAG


BAG et al list not only NT usage of a word but also its usage in classical literature.
John Alsop's Index is a helpful index to BAGD, listing for each verse of the NT the page(s) and section number in which each word is discussed in BAGD. This renders BAG somewhat accessible to the student unfamiliar with Greek, although BAG is probably too confusing for such a one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ephesians 1</th>
<th>refers to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>εὐλογέω</td>
<td>p 322, quadrant c, §3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>εὐλογητός</td>
<td>p 322, quadrant d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>εὐλογία</td>
<td>p 323, quadrant a, §3a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Louv & Nida


This Lexicon, colloquially referred to as Louw & Nida, gives words by semantic domain.
Theological Wordbooks

Theological Wordbooks or Dictionaries are collections of essays about Hebrew/Greek words in OT/NT.

OT

NIDOTTE


A compilation of evangelical scholars, developed as the counterpart to NIDNTT. The five volumes contain four sections:

1. Guide to Old Testament Theology and Exegesis: 1:1-218. Several good introductory essays, available also as a separate paperback volume: *A Guide to Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999). Especially recommended for the purposes of Word Studies are the following:
   b. Hebrew Word Index, 5:217-240. This index references discussion of words only outside the main lexical entry.
   c. Scripture Index, 5:241-594.
   d. Subject Index, 5:595-757.
   e. Numbering System Indexes, 5:759-834.
      i. Strong’s numbers—Goodrick/Kohlenberger numbers, 5:761-796.
      ii. Goodrick/Kohlenberger numbers—Strong’s numbers, 5:797-834.

Words are arranged by G/K number. Each entry discusses use of the word [or its cognates—similar words in related languages] under three categories: ANE (Ancient Near East), OT, P-B (Post-Biblical). For "bless" as used in Genesis 1:1-2:3, the relevant entry is *brk*, #1385, 1:757-767, written by Michael Brown.

The Index of Semantic Fields contains the following entry for Blessing:

**Blessing:** → *ašré* (truly happy, blessed, how happy, #897; 3r II, be, make, or pronounce happy, blessed, #887; *išer*, happiness, #891); *brk II* (bless, praise, greet, #1385; *brakâ*, blessing, #1388); see *Happiness; *Praise

The asterisk before “Happiness”; “Praise” indicates that these entries are in the Topical Dictionary, 4:345-1322.

In the Subject Index the listing for “blessing” first lists the primary entries for the word: 1:570-572, 644, 757-767; 4:221. Then follows a list of 27 sub-categories of blessing.

NIDOTTE classifies *brk* into two separate words: *brk* I kneel G/K 1384; *brk* II bless G/K 1385. These are homonyms: words spelt the same way but with different meanings. TWOT treats *brk* as a single word.

TWOT


TWOT uses its own numbering scheme, based on the Hebrew root of each verb. An index at the back of volume 2 cross-references the Strong’s and TWOT numbers. NIDOTTE is now more comprehensive and current than TWOT.
Word Studies

TDOT


Translation of the German *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* [ThWAT] (1970–). 15 volumes have been translated so far. International, interdenominational, mostly liberal. *TDOT* is the OT counterpart of *TDNT*. Not recommended for those not knowing Hebrew.

TLOT


Translation of the German *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament* [THAT] (1971-1976). *TLOT*/THAT is the product of mostly German liberal scholarship. Though the work is dated in some respects, many of the essays are “classics” in their field, and hence still worth reading. Words are arranged in Hebrew order. *TLOT* covers a much more limited selection of words than do *NIDOTTE, TDOT, TWOT*.

Volume 3 contains a Statistical Appendix, and five Indexes:
1. Index of Hebrew and Aramaic Word Arranged by Main Entry, pp 1449-1468
2. Index of Hebrew and Aramaic Words Arranged Alphabetically, pp 1469-1483
3. Index of English Glosses, pp 1484-1487
4. Index of Modern Authors, pp 1488-1507
5. Index of Scripture References, pp 1508-1638.

The Index of English Glosses (a gloss is a translation of a word) refers to page 266 (volume 1) for the word “bless.” An especially helpful feature of *TLOT* is that each entry lists the reference number or page number in the other reference tools (Strong’s, BDB, *TDOT, TWOT, NIDOTTE*) of the word under discussion. The entry for “bless” on p 266 begins thus:

ירחא brk pi. to bless
S 1288; BDB 138b; HALOT 1:159b; *TDOT* 2:279–308; *TWOT* 285; *NIDOTTE* 1385

In order, these refer to the Strong’s number, page number of Brown-Driver-Briggs *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, page number in Kohler & Baumgartner’s *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, *TDOT* page numbers, *TWOT* number, *NIDOTTE* number (G/K).

NT

NIDNTT


Translation, revision and expansion of the German *Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament* (1967-71). Volume 4 consists of indexes. Colloquially referred to as “Colin Brown” after its editor. Recently thoroughly revised as:


TDNT


The Word

The word “bless” as used in Gen 1:1–2:3 and Eph 1:3.

Hebrew

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>vb.</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>G/K</th>
<th>OT</th>
<th>Gen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barak</td>
<td>1288</td>
<td>1385</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>72</td>
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<tr>
<td>N. Berakah</td>
<td>1293</td>
<td>1388</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>16</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

BDB 138b, TWOT 285.

Greek

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>vb.</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>G/K</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>Eph</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eulogeō</td>
<td>2127</td>
<td>2328</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>N. Eulogia</td>
<td>2129</td>
<td>2330</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Adj. Eulogētos</td>
<td>2128</td>
<td>2329</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“εὐλογέω etc.,” NIDNTTE 2:317-326.

**Alphabets**

**Hebrew**

There are several different translation schemes for Hebrew. The SBL system has attained dominant popularity. The TDOT system is outdated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>consonants</th>
<th>SBL¹</th>
<th>SBL²</th>
<th>TDOT</th>
<th>TWOT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ålep, alef</td>
<td>א</td>
<td>ה</td>
<td>נ</td>
<td>פ</td>
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<td>tâw, tav</td>
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<td>ת</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ SBL academic style, ² SBL general purpose style

**Greek**

The only disagreement in the transliteration of Greek is whether to render upsilon as u or y.

| alpha | α | a | ὃν | ν | ν |
| bêta | β | b | ξ | ξ | ξ |
| gamma | γ | γ | ομικρόν | ο | ο |
| delta | Δ | δ | πι | Π | π | π |
| epsilon | Ε | ε | ρῦ | Ρ | ρ | ρ |
| zêta | Ζ | ζ | σιγμα | Σ | σ | σ |
| êta | Η | η | ταύ | Τ | τ | τ |
| thêta | Θ | θ | υπσίλον | Υ | υ | υ/υ |
| iôta | Ι | i | φι | Φ | φ | φ |
| kappa | Κ | κ | χι | Χ | χ | χ |
| lambda | Λ | λ | πσι | Ψ | ψ | ψ |
| mu | Μ | μ | ομέγα | Ω | ω | ω |

8
Resources

Concordances

*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance.* BS425.S8 220.52.


Dictionaries


Lexicons


Wordbooks


Word Studies


Abbreviations
