



Find your way around

Aim of lesson

To show the students how they can do research for themselves.

Preparation required

You will need at least one concordance, preferably both Young's and Strong's, and a King James (Authorised) Version of the Bible. If you can only get one, Young's would be preferable. There are also some on-line concordances, but at first at least it is easier to see how it works using a paper copy.

Work through the examples so that you are familiar with what the students are discovering, particularly as the method will be different depending which concordances you are using.

The students will need to use a concordance in several lessons during this course, so it would be good to think ahead. Maybe you could beg, steal (only joking) or borrow more than one; or perhaps have access to a laptop with something like eSword installed, or something similar on a smartphone.

Outline of lesson

What is a concordance?

A Bible concordance is divided into 2 main parts. The first part is a dictionary of all (almost) the words in the Bible. Young lists the words grouped under the original Hebrew/Greek word, Strong lists them as they occur and gives them all a unique number which you use to find them in the lexicon. The second part is a lexicon, which is a list of the original Hebrew and Greek words along with their meanings.

Young's and Strong's were written before modern versions of the Bible so you do need to use an AV/King James version for looking up words in a concordance. It would also be helpful to have more modern versions available.

Different types

Concordances all do the same thing in slightly different ways. Young's used to be the most popular as it is probably the easiest to use. More recently Strong's system of giving each word a unique number has meant it has been the easiest version to computerise. There is also Cruden's which was the first concordance to be produced. It doesn't have a lexicon section so is of less use than the other two.

e-Sword is a computer concordance and it can be downloaded free. The advantage is that it is very quick once you understand how concordances work.

How does it work?

Show the class the different sections of a concordance. If you have Young's, chose a word, for example 'house'. In the dictionary section show them that Young lists the word 'house', its literal meaning, how you write it in Hebrew, how you pronounce the Hebrew word. Bayith is the original word for all but one occurrence of house. Then look up bayith in the lexicon at the back and you will find that it has been translated into a number of different words.

So while house is almost always bayith, bayith isn't always translated house.

Strong works differently. He lists words in the dictionary as they occur in order and gives each word a unique number. Look at 'house' in Strong's and you will find that it is the number 1004. Look up 1004 in the lexicon section and you will find the word written in Hebrew, and its meaning.

What does it let you do?

- You can find verses when you have forgotten where they are.
- You can find out how a word is translated.
- You can find out what a word means¹
- The same English word may be translated from a number of Hebrew or Greek words, or one original word may be translated into several English words. Looking at the original words can give us an insight into what is actually going on.

¹ It is worth pointing out that translating is a complicated business and we can't always translate things directly. The French, for instance, use 'mon petit chou-fleur' (my little cauliflower) as a term of affection, but it wouldn't work so well in English!

Using it

Get the students to do the exercises in their book. The sections on 'What does that name mean?' and 'Help! Where can I find it?' are fairly self explanatory. Explain why choosing a more unusual word will usually make finding a verse easier.

You may need to guide the students through the section on how words are translated.

How are words translated? - 'inn'

By seeing the difference between the Greek words kataluma (Strong's 2646) and pandoecheion (or Pando depending which concordance you use - Strong's 3829) the class should be able to discover that Jesus was probably laid in a manger not because there wasn't room in an inn, but in a guest-room in a house. The last supper we know was in a large furnished upper room. The house of Jesus birth seems to have had a separate guest chamber maybe like the house Elijah stayed at in Zarephath and the house Elisha stayed in at Shunem. The students could look up 'chamber' to discover that the rooms that those rooms might have been more like 'loft' rooms which would make sense if Elisha's was added for him.

The Good Samaritan would have taken the injured man to a commercial inn more like an inn as we know it.

How are words translated? - 'love'

The words in John are naturally chosen with care. By putting the original words into the dialogue we can see that there is more going on than at first appears.

The class will notice that Jesus asks Peter if he loves him deeply the first twice. Peter replies that he loves Jesus as a friend. The third time Jesus asks Peter with phileo not agape - 'Are you my friend?'

It is possible that because Peter had just denied Jesus he couldn't bring himself to promise to love Jesus so much again. Peter felt he had failed and let Jesus down by denying him. By the time Peter writes his letters many years later he always uses agape.

The original words for 'feed' are not all the same in this passage either. In verse 15 and 17 the word means 'to feed or pasture'; in verse 16 'to tend as a shepherd'.

How are words translated? - 'erets'

The students will need to know that the Strong's number for erets is 776 because the words in the index are not all in alphabetical order. The class will find that this is a word that most frequently means country, land or earth but has also been translated field, ground, nation, way and world.

2 Kings 5:19 says 'so he departed from him a little way' or 'some distance' The original word for 'way' is erets but putting country, land or earth there wouldn't really make sense, so the translators had to choose an English word that would make sense. This is why a totally literal translation is impossible.

If we look at the word 'country' we find erets is virtually the only original word. If we look at earth we find both adamah and erets. If we look at land we find adamah and erets and if we look at ground we find adamah and erets as the majority of original words. In the last 3 cases erets is the most common original word.

Get the class to look up some examples to see if substituting the words makes sense.

Relevance to our lives

Knowing how concordances work will enable the students to do their own research when they want to. There are some suggestions for what to look up in the following lessons. Even the less academic students should find it interesting to know how it all works.