

The Concordant Method

What is the Concordant Method ?

During and since the nineteenth century there has arisen amongst believers of the scriptures, a plan of study which has come to be designated the "concordant method". The aim has been to overcome the deficiencies of the current versions. It has come about gradually, gaining importance by the passage of time and recognition of the value of the accruing results. The process has been characterised by individual effort, certain of succeeding generations recognising more vividly its value and possibilities. The Concordant Version is the product of the exhaustive and intensive application of this plan. It should, however, be remarked that the simple method of using a concordance was only the initial step toward such a result as the Concordant Version, considerably more work and penetration has been required to produce such a work. It is intended to herein speak briefly of matters which bear more or less on the subject.

The concordant plan of studying the scriptures is a method using a concordance to discover the concord of a word, not in any version of the Word of GOD, but in the original. Thus we require a work which collects together every occurrence of a Hebrew or Greek word, irrespective of how it may be translated. The primary aim is to extract the usage, or usages, of a word, and from these to conclude a meaning or force required by the discovered associations. This enables us to settle upon a definite standard for a given word, considering it as a word, in contexts of the original; that is we are not considering English the requirements, but aiming at the consistency inhering the original.

We are seeking general and definite meanings for the terms of the original, as required by their various associations. Thus we are working along the lines of the linguistic law that meanings of words are decided by usage; language is always undergoing a slow and silent change, the connection between words and ideas is conventional, it is not rigid; the meaning of a word must be taken as that fixed by its usage. In compiling a dictionary of the English language, the index to meanings of words is the various usages which current life and literature give to words. The concordant method applies this principle to the scriptures; it takes the meanings of words out of the hands of the lexicographer and translator and leaves it in the hands of the usage which GOD has chosen in the original of His word. We thus deal with the word of God on the basis that He has used words with an exactitude of which man is incapable.

It is not to be understood that the subject is simple; it requires much attention and painstaking work, but there is a rich reward to the investigator. It is difficult to be more than suggestive as to the mode of procedure, but for the initial stages of concordant work the following may be of value:

Meanings may be decided by the cumulative evidence from a range of contexts; for this we gather facts from statements in the associations of a word. These will frequently indicate the sense of the original word.

The force of some words is discoverable by taking them in series and noting their points of difference in usage. We can also confirm by contrasts, observing their opposites.

Words which are of the same family should be searched out so that connections between the words may be discovered and grasped.

It is also necessary to note what words keep company together. This companionship amongst words gives us the affinity, and thereby indicates their meanings.

If we can decide the meaning of say a noun, then we have a key to the sense of a verb, or vice versa.

Attention and application to the subject will bring ample reward in results and growing facility. Our aim is to define by means of English expressions, Hebrew or Greek words, in their widest sense, as discovered from their usage. We shall thus eventually transfer the vocabulary of the Hebrew or Greek scriptures into English, with the advantage of having defined them under constant conditions. In other words we reach a position analogous to say an English dictionary. By this means we have a basis for a version projected on this principle.

In order that we do not violate the promised results of our work, it will be necessary to formulate regulations

to further guide our operations. These must, first of all, be on general lines, and will have to be augmented as the subject becomes more fully apprehended. At this stage we can resolve that any deviation from our basis word must be because of:

1. a derived sense, that is, when a word is related to something concrete, or when something concrete is referred to the abstract.
2. other changes from general usage.
3. figurative use; only when transferred to another sphere. In all cases the exact figure to be defined or named.
4. there is also the meaning which arises in connection with other words to express something other than the simple sense of the individual word. This is its grammatical use, and tends to form the general idiom of a language. It is outside the scope of simple concordant studies. It requires a certain knowledge of the grammar and syntax of the original. It is based upon the fact that we use words to convey thought, and in so doing give them relations to other words forming sentences, whereby they become possessed of differing nuances to the simple meaning. To illustrate this, we might instance that in Greek there are certain prepositions which can be used with various cases of the nouns, and their meanings vary accordingly. Again an adjective may function as a noun, or vice versa, and then it tends to take a degree of modification or amplification.

It should be further observed that we can never have one word in the original expressing directly opposite values. Any secondary sense, due to abnormal usage, must nearly coincide with the primary and general. The demand for secondary meanings is outside the initial stage of concordant studies; it belongs to the second and third parts of the work, that of a version and exegesis. It partially arises because of the differing genius of the linguistic mould of the two languages. It is not mere idiom or special irregularities, but the fact that every language is an idiom in itself; it has a peculiar mode of expressing thought due to its own etymology, usage of words, grammar and syntax. For example, the Greek language has few synonyms, but the English is rich in words of this class.

The Greek would use one word in many connections; it would use the same word in differing realms of thought, either of time, space or number. But in English we should use differing words. It is not that the idea is contrary, the root idea is the same, and the Greek language maintains this inflexibility by using one word, but in English we might use half a dozen words to express the same concept in connection with different subjects.

A word names a distinct item or portion of thought, it makes thought speakable. Words in their origin are elementary and simple. Such elements are really inflexible and convey unvarying meanings traceable to these etymic bases. Thus the original meaning of words in a language may be found by considering etymological derivations. From the etymons of words have arisen other words by the compounding of etymons. In the process of time words have by usage acquired meanings other than the mere etymological meanings, in fact, these latter have been entirely lost in some cases.

Meanings derived in usage vary with differing eras; hence contemporary literature must only be compared, from which to conclude meanings by usage. Such considerations tend to stress the feature that by the use of a concordance, say of the Greek scriptures, we keep within the proper boundaries. Moreover, works other than the scriptures, do not maintain the correctness and accuracy of usage which characterise a divine revelation; they are really of little use as guides.

The direction to which the above points is that of certainty in regard to any conclusions which do take in all the facts contained in the various contexts of a word. It is essential that care be exercised to see nothing is overlooked or taken for granted. So far we have briefly considered the method of working with a concordance; the full merit of the process is most apparent when it is carried to a definite issue such as the Concordant Version.

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