HEBREW AND GREEK WORD-STUDY FALLACIES

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The purpose of this article is to present a list of seven word-study fallacies that are regularly committed in exegetical study and that are evident in sermons, commentaries, books, and scholarly articles where statements are made about the meanings of biblical words. Each word-study fallacy is a misunderstanding of how word-meaning is determined; English, Hebrew, and Greek examples (wherever possible) are given to show why a particular view of words and their meanings is incorrect.

It may be questioned why this article is needed when lists of word-study fallacies are readily available. There are two reasons in particular why this article has been written. First, as is explained in more detail below, it is because I believe a more helpful categorisation of the fallacies is possible than what is found in other lists. Second, this article has been written because none of the available lists of fallacies (of which I am aware) provide full examples for the fallacies. In other lists, examples are merely alluded to, occasionally provided, or a preference for one of the biblical languages (usually Greek) is evident. The present paper provides English, Hebrew, and Greek examples of all fallacies, whenever possible.[2]

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2.   Ideally this article would also include Aramaic examples; unfortunately this is beyond my expertise. If the reader is able to grasp the fallacies with Hebrew and Greek examples, it should be a small step to then recognize fallacies with Aramaic word-studies.

The need for this article may also be questioned due to the suggestion that little harm is done when incorrect statements are made about the meanings of biblical words. For instance, it may be asked: *if a preacher has good things to say, does it really matter if he is partially inaccurate about what one word means?* It is true that many good and worthwhile things can be learned from a sermon, commentary, book, or article that contains word-study fallacies. But it is also true that until one understands what a biblical passage says, its relevance for today can never be fully explicated, and part of understanding what a biblical passage says is to understand what the words in the passage mean. For those who are interested in understanding what the Scriptures actually say, a correct understanding of the meanings of the words contained in its pages is of utmost importance.

In his own discussion of exegetical fallacies, Carson wisely warns that a focus on error can have a very damaging spiritual impact upon a person.[3] The purpose of this article is not simply to enable people to recognize errors made in word-studies, but by recognizing errors to be better prepared to accurately determine the meanings of biblical words. Sometimes the path to truth includes recognizing error along the way.[4] Carson also mentions the potential danger that a person who is made aware of the many exegetical errors that can be made may become discouraged and conclude that the Scriptures cannot be correctly understood.[5] Yet ignorance of error does not result in more accurate exegesis, but simply an unawareness of errors made.[6] Therefore, in order to increase the reader's ability to distinguish between truth and error about what biblical words mean, the sources used in the compilation of this list of word-study fallacies will be discussed, followed by the list itself.

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3. Carson, *Fallacies*, 22.
4. I have explained the positive side of how to determine the meaning of a biblical word in Baxter, "Meanings."
5. Carson, *Fallacies*, 22.
6. Ibid.

Modern Linguistics and Word-Meaning

James Barr's *The Semantics of Biblical Language* was published in 1961. In it he brought some advances in modern linguistic study to bear upon biblical scholarship, primarily criticizing "certain methods in the handling of linguistic evidence in theological discussion."[7] His primary argument may be summarized with his statement: "But as a whole the distinctiveness of biblical thought and language has to be settled at sentence level, that is, by the things the writers say, and not by the words they say them with."[8] For instance, the distinct biblical thought found in Eph 2:8a (ESV), "For by grace you have been saved through faith," is not discovered primarily by examining the meaning of individual words such as "saved" and "faith," but by recognizing the meaning conveyed in the entire sentence (and indeed the entire discourse in which the sentence is found). Barr understood that a word contributes meaning to a sentence, but he rejected the idea that the word also contains the meaning of an entire sentence or discourse in which it is found (e.g. "saved" does not mean "to be delivered from the punishment of sin by grace through faith"). Barr criticized Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* in particular for its failure to adequately distinguish between words themselves and theological concepts expressed through the use of multiple words and sentences.

The widespread influence of Barr's *Semantics* on biblical scholarship is undeniable. Many scholars recognize Barr's role in bringing linguistic principles to bear upon biblical study and have been influenced by *Semantics*.[9] Guthrie goes so far as to say: "students of the text neglect to their peril recent advances in the study of language, most notably the redirection brought about

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7.   Barr, *Semantics*, 6; cf. 1.

8.   Ibid., 270; cf. 233; Childs, review of *Semantics*, 375.

9.   E.g., Silva, *Biblical Words*, 18; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 82; Childs, review of *Semantics*, 374; Bartholomew, "Biblical Theology," 8; Boda, "ידה in Hebrew Research," 283–84; Nida, "Contemporary Linguistics," 83 n 12; Porter, *Studies*, 8; Porter, "Ancient Languages," 161; Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," 56–57.

by James Barr in *The Semantics of Biblical Language.*"[10] It is for this reason that Barr's *Semantics* will not be neglected, but will be consulted here in the development of a list of word-study fallacies.[11]

Barr does not include a list of word-study fallacies in *Semantics*, so I also consulted Carson's *Exegetical Fallacies.* His first chapter in particular ("Word-Study Fallacies") was influenced by Barr's *Semantics*, and was helpful in determining an appropriate classification of word-study fallacies.[12] Now in its second edition, Carson's *Fallacies* has been well-received as an introductory text for evangelical pastors and seminary students who wish to be aware of a number of common fallacies (word-study, grammatical, logical, presuppositional, and historical) made in exegetical study. Neither Barr nor Carson present a comprehensive list of word-study fallacies, and improvements can be made to the classification of word-study fallacies that they do include.[13] Therefore, the following list of

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10. Guthrie, "Exegesis of Hebrews," 596.

11. Not all scholars have responded positively to Barr's *Semantics*, but have criticized part or much of what he wrote. This is not the place for a full response to Barr's critics, due to space limitations, as well as the fact that the criticisms leveled against Barr are multi-faceted, and relate in part to his negative comments regarding the biblical theology movement (which are outside the bounds of the present paper). Briefly, in response to certain criticisms against Barr, it can be acknowledged that words do in fact bear meaning, and at times that meaning may be theological in nature. It can also be acknowledged that Barr was unfairly critical of the main arguments of entire books based upon their faulty use of linguistic evidence at certain points. At the same time, Barr's argument can be affirmed that each word has a semantic range, and the meaning of a word is limited and defined by the context in which it is found. Furthermore, Barr is correct that theology is to be derived from sentences, as opposed to the words used in those sentences. For criticisms of Barr's *Semantics* (and some of his other works) see Childs, review of *Semantics*; Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 15; Yarbrough, *Salvation Historical Fallacy?*, 232; Watson, *Text and Truth*, 17–28; Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics*, 123–25.

12. Carson, *Fallacies*, 27 n 1.

13. Cf. ibid., 24–25. This should not be taken as a denigration of the work of Barr, Carson, or any of the other scholars I have consulted in preparing a list of word-study fallacies. Indeed, I am indebted to them for I have stood upon their shoulders, depending upon their work in the creation of this article. It is

word-study fallacies was developed with a consideration not only of *Semantics* and *Fallacies*, but also other scholarly literature, including Osborne's *Hermeneutical Spiral* and Silva's *Biblical Words*.

Word-Study Fallacies

The following list of seven word-study fallacies describes errors that can be made in the process of determining the meaning of a word in a particular context. Six of the seven fallacies include either two, three, or four subsections, each of which is a different form of the fallacy. Wherever possible, English, Hebrew, and Greek examples have been given for each subsection. The examples have intentionally *not* been taken from any books, articles, or sermons. This is not because examples are difficult to find; unfortunately, examples of word-study fallacies are readily available. Rather, examples have not been taken from published materials or sermons so that this article will not be ignored because it criticizes what has been written or stated by a respected scholar or preacher. All who are involved in the study of the meanings of biblical words are in danger of committing these fallacies. In fact, most of us who discuss the meanings of words in our sermons or published materials will likely commit at least some of these fallacies at some point, because we all make mistakes. In the pursuit of truth about the meanings of words, an understanding of these seven fallacies can aid in an avoidance of error.

1. *Basic Meaning Fallacy*
The first fallacy is an assumption that each word has a basic meaning that exists in every context in which it is used.[14] There are a number of different ways in which this fallacy is evident:

A. The root of each word is considered to be the bearer of its basic meaning, which is evident in every word built on that

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my hope that others will learn from my work and perhaps improve the list I have given of word-study fallacies.

14. Nida, "Contemporary Linguistics," 84.

root.[15] Thus, since "awe" is the root of "awful," it could be claimed that someone who calls food awful is filled with wonder and amazement by how it tastes. Yet people may call food awful that they never expected to like before they ate it. A Hebrew example would be to draw a root-based connection between the meanings of לֶחֶם (*lehem*, bread) and מִלְחָמָה (*milhamah*, war). It would be incorrect to suggest that because these two words share the same root, every war is essentially a struggle for food.[16] A Greek example is to start with the verb ἀποστέλλω (*apostellō*) and to give it the basic meaning of "to send out." This basic meaning would then be applied to every use of the noun ἀπόστολος (*apostolos*), saying that the noun means "one who is sent out," simply because they share the same root.[17] An English example of this phenomenon would be to start with the verb "bank" in a sentence such as "I will bank my most recent paycheck," and give the verb the basic meaning of "to deposit funds in a bank." This basic meaning would then be applied to the noun "banker" by giving it the meaning of "one who deposits funds in a bank." Yet this definition is entirely misleading because it gives the impression that everyone who deposits money in a bank account can be called a "banker." Words that share a common root often have some relationship in meaning, but that relationship is determined by examining how the words are used, rather than assuming a relationship based upon a shared root. The meaning of a word is not controlled by its root.

B. In Hebrew, the meaning of a Qal verb is sometimes taken as the basic meaning of that verb in every stem. For simplicity's sake, introductory Hebrew grammars often explain the meaning of the Hebrew verbal stems in relation to the meaning of Qal verbs. Thus, if the Qal verb בּוֹשׁ (*bosh*) means "to be ashamed," then the Hiphil form of the verb is said to mean, "to cause to be ashamed." This may be helpful for students learning the Hebrew

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15. This is often referred to as "The Root Fallacy." Cf. Barr, *Semantics*, 100–106; Carson, *Fallacies*, 28–33.

16. Barr, *Semantics*, 102.

17. Carson, *Fallacies*, 28, 30. For a discussion of the semantic range of ἀπόστολος (*apostolos*) see Baxter, "Meanings."

language, but it should not be forced upon every occurrence of a Hiphil verb. For instance, in Jer 2:26 we find: "As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed [הֹבִישׁוּ, *hovishu*, Hiphil perfect 3rd common plural]: they, their kings, their officials, their priests, and their prophets." The meaning of Jer 2:26 would be distorted if the Hiphil of בּוֹשׁ (*bosh*) were to be translated "to cause to be ashamed," for it is the house of Israel (the subject of the verb) herself who will be shamed when her actions are shown for what they are. The meaning of a verb is determined by examining its uses in context rather than by appealing to a basic meaning of that verb in the Qal stem.[18] There is no English parallel to this form of the Basic Meaning Fallacy.

C. A Hebrew or Greek word is said to mean what the English word that is used to translate it means. Barr cites an example (which also includes etymologizing—see below) in which the basic meaning of the English word "holy" is said to be "healthy, sound, whole." This supposed basic meaning is then read into every context in which the word "holy" is used to translate a Hebrew or Greek word (e.g. קָדוֹשׁ, *qadhosh*, or ἅγιος, *hagios*). Therefore, the injunction from God, "be holy, for I am holy," (Lev 11:44–45; cf. 1 Pet 1:16) is taken as a command to be whole or healthy. Barr writes, "The whole absurd construction of 'holy' as really meaning 'whole' could only arise on the basis of English and by ignoring the Greek and Hebrew represented by that English."[19] The meaning of a Hebrew or Greek word must be determined by how that word is used in context, rather than by assuming that it has a basic meaning equivalent to an English word used to translate it in a particular context.

2. *Etymologizing*

The second fallacy is the importing of a word's meaning from a different time period onto its use in a particular context. This fallacy occurs when the meaning of the word is derived either from an earlier time period or from a later time period.

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18. Barr, *Semantics*, 102.
19. Ibid., 112; cf. 166.

A. The meaning of a word is determined either by an appeal to its "original meaning" or to an older meaning of the word that is no longer pertinent to the use of the word in the literature under study.[20] The error in such a method of determining a word's meaning is made evident by the sentence: "I feel gay today." This sentence means something very different in 2010 (*homosexual*) than it would have in 1910 (*happy*). Barr gives the Hebrew example of those who interpret the divine name שַׁדַּי (*shadday*, almighty) as meaning "the sufficient one" due to its supposed etymological derivation from the relative pronoun שַׁ (*sha*, who) and the word דַּי (*day*, enough).[21] In a discussion of Greek etymologies, Silva mentions those who claim that ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*) does not simply mean "sin," but "a missing of the mark," or that ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*) does not simply mean "church," but "those who are called out."[22] Most users of a language are completely unaware of a word's etymology. For instance, Christians who call Jesus "Lord" do so without any reference to the use of "lord" in Old English to mean "loaf-keeper."[23] Therefore, an etymology of a word cannot be used to explain the meaning of a Hebrew or Greek word unless it can be reasonably demonstrated that the author intended the etymological connections to be made.

B. A particular instance of etymologizing by an appeal to an earlier meaning is when the meaning of a compound word is assumed to be the sum of its parts. One might claim that a particular insect is called a "butterfly" because its movements are so smooth that it is like watching butter fly. It becomes clear when considering the words "overhang" and "hangover" that the meaning of a compound word is not necessarily the sum of its individual parts. This fallacy is often evident in discussions of Greek verbs which are prefixed (i.e., compounded) by a pre-position. For example, one could suggest that the word

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20. Ibid., 107, 159; Lyons, *Semantics*, 1:244; Boda, "Lexical Analysis," 2; Carson, *Fallacies*, 35–37.
21. Barr, *Semantics*, 110 n 2.
22. Silva, *Biblical Words*, 45.
23. Cf. Allen, ed., *Oxford Dictionary*, 434; Barr, *Semantics*, 110 n 3.

ἀναγινώσκω (*anaginōskō*, to read) means: "to know more than," due to the common glosses[24] given for its component parts ("upwards, up" for ἀνά, *ana*, with verbs, and "to know" for γινώσκω, *ginōskō*). The fallacy with this approach is in assuming that a "verb-with-prefixed-preposition" in Greek always bears the combined meaning of each component of the new word. There are, in fact, three options:

  (i) the force of both preposition and verb continue (e.g., εἰσέρχομαι, *eiserchomai*, to go into),

  (ii) the preposition intensifies the thrust of the verb (e.g., ἀπολύω, *apolyō*, to release), or

  (iii) the preposition transforms the meaning of the verb altogether (e.g., ἀναγινώσκω, *anaginōskō*, to read).[25]

Thus, the meaning of a Greek compound word *may* be determined by combining the meanings of its component parts, but this must be discovered from the uses of the word, rather than simply be assumed to be true.

  C. The meaning of a word in a later time period is imposed on the use of that same word in an earlier time period (within the same language), also known as reverse etymologizing. For example, even though "nephew" is currently used to refer to the son of one's brother or sister, it could at one time be used for the son of a person's son or daughter (a grandson).[26] It would then be incorrect to conclude that a child who was called the nephew of his grandfather in a piece of literature from this older time period was thereby a product of an incestuous relationship between the man's brother and the man's daughter. Words change meaning over time, so a later meaning of a word cannot be taken to be the meaning of that word in an earlier time period. This error can be made when the meaning of a word in Modern Hebrew or Greek is taken to be the meaning of that word in Biblical Hebrew or Koine Greek, respectively. For example, the fact that the word חַשְׁמַל (*hashmal*) can be used to mean "electricity" in Modern Hebrew is entirely irrelevant for determining

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24. A gloss is an English word-substitute.
25. Porter, *Idioms*, 140–41; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 86.
26. "Nephew," *Merriam-Webster*; Carson, *Fallacies*, 35 n 21.

its meaning in Ezek 1:4, "As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming metal [הַחַשְׁמַל, *hahashmal*]."[27] Since "electricity" was not available for use in Ezekiel's day, this meaning of חַשְׁמַל (*hashmal*) cannot be imposed upon the use of the word in Ezek 1:4. Carson notes that the early Church Fathers were sometimes guilty of reverse etymologizing with Greek words: "It is not obvious, for instance, that their use of ἐπίσκοπος (*episkopos*, bishop) to designate a church leader who has oversight over several local churches has any New Testament warrant."[28] The meaning of a word needs to be determined by an examination of the uses of that word within the same time period. Nevertheless, Cotterell and Turner do note an important caution when considering this fallacy, suggesting "the possibility that some senses only certainly attested in the period shortly after the New Testament, might actually have been current in the New Testament period itself, although not witnessed to it in any extant writing."[29] One must, of course, be cautious in suggesting evidence of this occurring in any particular passage.

   D. The meaning of a Hebrew or Greek word is equated with the meaning of a word in a different language with which it is

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   27. Thanks to Dr. Mark Boda for this example.

   28. Carson, *Fallacies*, 33.

   29. Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics*, 134–35. Here is the example they give: "A case in point is the Greek expression *stoicheia (tou kosmou)* used at Gal. 4.3, 9 and Col. 2.8, 20. The term could be translated literally 'elements (of the world)', but this is meaningless. The real question is whether the sense is 'basic principles' (so NIV) or 'elemental spirits' (i.e. planetary powers—so RSV). The latter sense is not certainly attested until after the NT in the late third century (or later) Pseudo-Callisthenes (1,12,1), and in the (probably earlier, but undatable) *Testament of Solomon* (8.2; 18.2). But despite the lack of definite attestation, many scholars feel, both from the way Hellenistic Judaism associated the elements and the planets with angelic powers, and from what Paul actually says in these contexts, that something like 'elemental spirits' must be what Paul meant."

etymologically related.[30] When the word in a different language is from a later time period, it is an example of reverse etymologizing. In Hebrew this occurs most often with words in cognate languages (languages which derive from a common ancestral language). Due to the vast number of *hapax legomena* (words occurring only one time in the Scriptures) in the Hebrew Bible, cognate languages are sometimes explored to help determine the meanings of unknown words.[31] As helpful as this procedure is at times, it must be recognized that meanings of words derived from cognate languages are only guesses (even though those guesses may in fact be correct). Since many words change meaning through the course of time, there is no guarantee that the meaning of a word in a cognate language will be helpful for determining the meaning of a Hebrew word in the Bible. Groom's caution here is wisely noted: "Contrary to the impression given by traditional dictionaries of [Biblical Hebrew], cognate languages are not the first port of call; rather they are the last resort."[32] When at all possible, the meaning of a Hebrew word should be determined without any consideration of the cognate languages. Etymological connections are sometimes made between Greek and English words, due to the fact that many English words are etymologically related to Greek words. For example, the fact that "dynamite" finds etymological connections with the Greek word δύναμις (*dynamis*) is sometimes thought to aid understanding of Rom 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power [δύναμις, *dynamis*] of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." However, dynamite was not invented until the 1800s by Alfred Nobel, so there is no way that Paul would have had the destructive power of dynamite in mind when speaking of the life-giving power of the gospel.[33] Etymological

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30. Carson, *Fallacies*, 33–35; Boda, "Lexical Analysis," 2; Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics*, 133–35.

31. For an explanation of how to determine the meanings of Hebrew and Greek words, see Baxter, "Meanings."

32. Groom, *Linguistic Analysis*, 173.

33. "Dynamite," *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

connections made to English words can sound impressive in sermons and Bible Studies, but they provide no help in understanding the biblical text.

3. *Swamp Water*[34]

The third fallacy is committed by taking a number of different meanings of a word, or information from contexts where that word is found, and suggesting that it is all relevant for understanding the word's meaning in a particular context.[35]

   A. In a given context a word may be limited or clarified by other information, but it is wrong to claim that that information is part of the word's meaning.[36] For instance, in the sentence, *Jesus saved Peter from his sins*, the word "saved" itself does not mean: *to deliver someone from the punishment for sin*. A person can be saved from many different dangers, whether that danger be drowning, burning in a fire, or punishment (either for wrongdoing or for being wrongfully accused). It is the context of the sentence, passage, or entire discourse that will indicate from what a person is being saved. Likewise, in Ezek 11:2 the prophet is told, "Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and who give wicked counsel [עֲצָת, *'atsath*] in this city." From this verse, it could be suggested that the word עֵצָה (*'ētsah*) refers to counsel that is given in a city, since the counsel in Ezek 11:2 was given in a city. This erroneous conclusion could lead to the idea that Ps 1:1 teaches us that if we want to avoid wicked counsel, then we should not spend any time in cities, because the verse says: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel [בַּעֲצָת, *ba'atsath*] of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers." A Greek example would be to suggest that ὁ λαός (*ho laos*) always refers to the Israelites

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34. The name of this fallacy is from Boda, "Lexical Analysis," 2; it refers to the practice of mixing multiple types of pop or juice to make a beverage that looks like water from a swamp.

35. Boda, "Lexical Analysis," 2–3; Carson, *Fallacies*, 60–63; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 84; Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics*, 122–23; Barr termed this fallacy "Illegitimate Totality Transfer" (*Semantics*, 218; cf. 70–71, 197, 221–22).

36. Barr, *Semantics*, 69.

because Heb 11:25 says that Moses chose "rather to be mis-treated with the people [τῷ λαῷ, *tō laō*] of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin." This misunderstanding of the word λαός (*laos*) could then lead to the conclusion that Titus 2:14 teaches that only Israelites can be redeemed by the blood of Jesus: "[Jesus] gave himself for us to redeem us from all law-lessness and to purify for himself a people [λαόν, *laon*] for his own possession who are zealous for good works."[37] Each word contributes meaning to the sentence in which it is found, but that word's meaning does not include the meanings of the other words in the sentence.

B. Information gleaned from a number of different contexts in which the same word is used is collectively said to be the mean-ing of the word. For example, it could be claimed that the word "robber" always refers to a white man wearing a mask who has a gun and steals diamonds, due to the following sentences:

- The robber reached his white hand into the broken display case and snatched up a diamond necklace.
- The gun in the robber's hand pointed menacingly in the grill of the employee.
- As he stepped into view of the camera, the robber's mask covered all but his cold eyes.

It might then be suggested that the sentence: "The robber cut her arm during the escape," implies that this woman views her-self as a man. It may be true that the woman in question views herself in some way as a man, but this has nothing to do with the fact that she is called a "robber." A Hebrew example would be to suggest that אֶרֶץ (*'erets*, land) means: *a wasteland filled with wild beasts,* because of the following passages: "Behold the land [אֶרֶץ, *'erets*] of the Chaldeans! This is the people that was not; Assyria destined it for wild beasts. They erected their siege towers, they stripped her palaces bare, they made her a ruin" (Isa 23:13; cf. Ezek 14:15), and Jer 2:15: "The lions have roared against him; they have roared loudly. They have made his land [אַרְצוֹ, *'artso*] a waste; his cities are in ruins, without

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37. Cf. Barr, *Semantics*, 234–35; Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics*, 122.

inhabitant" (cf. Jer 4:7). The fact that a particular אֶרֶץ (*'erets*, land) is a wasteland or that it is filled with wild beasts may be true, but this will be irrespective of the word אֶרֶץ (*'erets*, land) itself. Similarly, the Greek word ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*, to love) may be said to mean: "an act of willed self-sacrifice for the good of another"[38] like the kind that God has, due to passages such as Eph 5:2, "And walk in love, as Christ loved [ἠγάπησεν, *ēgapēsen*] us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God," and Luke 6:35, "But love [ἀγαπᾶτε, *agapate*] your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil." However, such an understanding of the word ἀγαπάω (*agapaō*, to love) makes it difficult to understand why (in Luke 11:43) Jesus would pronounce "Woe!" against the Pharisees because they "love [ἀγαπᾶτε, *agapate*] the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces." Why would Jesus condemn the type of love that God has, especially if the Pharisees' seating choice was a sacrifical act? It is also hard to understand how "an act of willed self-sacrifice for the good of another" is helpful for understanding the verb in 2 Pet 2:15, "They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved [ἠγάπησεν, *ēgapēsen*] gain from wrongdoing" (cf. LXX 2 Sam 13:4, 15, where Amnon rapes Tamar, whom he loves). Since all words have a range of meaning, information gathered from various passages in which a word is found cannot be imparted to the meaning of that word in a given context. The meaning of a word will be limited and controlled by the context in which it is found, but is different than the meaning of that entire sentence or context.

   C. Different meanings (or English glosses) of a word are gathered and all are taken to be relevant for understanding the meaning of that word in a particular context.[39] For instance, consider the sentence: *the man walked out of the house and placed his dirty socks in the basin*. A "basin" can be a wide shallow vessel used for holding liquids, or an area of land

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38. Carson, *Difficult Doctrine*, 26.

39. Barr, *Semantics*, 231–33.

drained by rivers (e.g., the Amazon Basin). It would be incorrect to argue that since the man placed his socks in a "basin," this meant that the water presumed to be in that basin would be poured out into a nearby river, simply because the word "basin" was used in the sentence. A Hebrew example would be to suggest that the unredeemed בַּיִת (*bayith*) in Lev 25:30, which remains in the possession of its buyer after the Year of Jubilee, refers both to the dwelling place and the family who lives in it because both of those meanings are given in a lexicon for בַּיִת (*bayith*). As a Greek example, in the so-called Parable of the Weeds in Matt 13:24–30, an enemy plants weeds in a man's wheat field. When the wheat grows up, Matt 13:26 tells us that weeds also ἐφάνη (*ephanē*), but it would then be wrong to suggest that the servants could tell the weeds had appeared because they were shining, simply because "to appear" and "to shine" are glosses commonly found in a lexicon for φαίνω (*phainō*).

4. *Lost in Translation*

The fourth fallacy lies in assuming that a word's range of meaning in one language will be perfectly matched by the range of a word's meaning in another language.

A. The meaning of a Greek word in the Septuagint (LXX) is assumed to be equivalent to the meaning of the Hebrew word which it translates.[40] An examination of the LXX is often helpful in biblical exegesis, but it cannot simply be assumed that a Greek word in the LXX and the Hebrew word which it translates are equivalent in meaning. This fallacy can be made from two different perspectives: a person studying a word in the Hebrew Bible may check the LXX to see how it has been translated; similarly, someone studying a word in the Greek New Testament may find that word in the LXX and then check to see what Hebrew word it translates. From either perspective, caution is

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40. For an introduction to the relationship between the MT (Masoretic Text) and the LXX for determining word-meaning, see: Silva, *Biblical Words*, 53–73; Groom, *Linguistic Analysis*, 73–91; cf. Barr, *Semantics*, 155, 188; Carson, *Fallacies*, 61–62; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 88.

essential when studying the LXX to determine the meaning of either a Hebrew or a Greek word, for at least the following reasons:

The LXX translators had differing competencies in Hebrew and Greek, which meant that sometimes the Hebrew text was misunderstood, or was poorly translated into Greek.

The books of the LXX evidence differing translation styles (e.g., following the order of the Hebrew words versus following a more natural Greek style).

There is no way of knowing for certain what Hebrew text was used in the translation of any book of the LXX. For example, Gen 2:2 reads, "And on the seventh (הַשְּׁבִיעִי, *hashshevi'i*) day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done." The LXX, on the other hand, says that God finished his work on the sixth (τῇ ἕκτῃ, *tē hektē*) day. It is difficult to know whether the LXX translator was using a Hebrew text that differed from the Masoretic Text (MT), or whether the change in day on which God completed his work was made in the LXX out of a desire to clarify that God did not work on the seventh day.

It must be stressed that even if it can be safely assumed that it is known which Hebrew text lies behind a particular LXX translation, the Greek word and the Hebrew word it translates cannot be equated in meaning. For example, Rom 3:23–25 says,

> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation [ἱλαστήριον, *hilastērion*] by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

There is great debate amongst scholars over the meaning of the word ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*) in this passage. The only other occurrence of it in the New Testament is in Heb 9:3–5, where we read,

> Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the

manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat [τὸ ἱλαστήριον, *to hilastērion*]. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

In the LXX, ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*) is the only word used to refer to the mercy seat, which in Hebrew is כַּפֹּרֶת (*kapporeth*). It would be wrong, however, to conclude from this that ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*) means the same thing as כַּפֹּרֶת (*kapporeth*), and thus in Rom 3:25 ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*) should be translated: "mercy seat." There are a couple of reasons why this conclusion would be erroneous:

ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*) is also used in the LXX to refer to the rims or ledges around the altar in Ezek 43:14, 17 (עֲזָרָה, *'azarah*), and to the capitals (כַּפְתּוֹר, *kaftor*) of the pillars in Amos 9:1. At the very least, this suggests that the semantic range of ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*) may be broader than "mercy seat" (i.e., assuming that ἱλαστήριον [*hilastērion*] is an appropriate word to use in Ezek 43:14, 17, and Amos 9:1).

ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*) is used in Koine Greek literature to refer to things other than the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant (e.g., Herod's propitiatory [ἱλαστήριον, *hilastērion*] monument he built after being frightened in a sepulchre; [Josephus, *Antiquities*, 16.182]; and the death of devout martyrs as an atoning sacrifice [τοῦ ἱλαστηρίου, *tou hilastēriou*] in 4 Macc 17:22). This fact shows that in Koine Greek there is a semantic range of ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*) that Paul was free to make complete use of in his writings. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that Paul uses ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*) to mean "mercy seat" in Rom 3:25 simply because it is used to translate כַּפֹּרֶת (*kapporeth*, mercy seat) in the LXX.

It may be that in Rom 3:25, Jesus is pictured as a new mercy seat on which blood was sprinkled for the atonement of sins. Such an argument, however, must be based upon contextual factors other than a simple claim that ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*) means the same thing as כַּפֹּרֶת (*kapporeth*, mercy seat). Words in different languages are highly unlikely to have the same range of meaning—even when those languages are Hebrew and Greek.

B. The assumption that one English word can be used to appropriately translate any one Hebrew or Greek word in every context in which that word occurs.[41] Boda gives the following Hebrew example:

> In Hebrew there is a word "todah" [תּוֹדָה] which [it has been argued] can mean one of two things: thanksgiving or admission of sin. Some scholars have sought for a central core of meaning [i.e., basic meaning] by offering the word "confession," which in English is used for admitting sin (confession of sin) but also for praising God (confession of faith). But they are really two different things in English with no real connection between the two.[42]

An example of the difference in the semantic ranges between Greek and English words can be seen in Heb 9:15–17:

> Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant [διαθήκης, *diathēkēs*], so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant [διαθήκη, *diathēkē*]. For where a will [διαθήκη, *diathēkē*] is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will [διαθήκη, *diathēkē*] takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.

The author of Hebrews plays off the different meanings of διαθήκη (*diathēkē*) in order to make his argument in chapter 9. This is a play on words that cannot be captured solely with either "covenant" or "will" in English, which is why the ESV has used both in the above quotation.[43] To force one English word to be

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41. Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 90–91.

42. Boda, "Lexical Analysis," 3; cf. Boda, "ידה in Hebrew Research."

43. At one time the word "testament" would have been a suitable translation for every occurrence of διαθήκη (*diathēkē*) in Heb 9:15–17 (cf. KJV), but this is no longer the case. Most people are unaware that "Old Testament" at one time conveyed the meaning: "Old Covenant," and even those who are aware of this fact are not likely to say: *God made a testament with Israel*. Similarly, in modern English, people are only likely to use the word "testament" in the sense of "will" in the fixed idiom: *Last Will and Testament*, and some of those who use this fixed idiom are completely unaware of what "testament" means.

used in every instance of a Hebrew or Greek word is to demand that the languages be more similar than they are.

5. *A Sea of Synonyms*
The fifth fallacy is a failure to recognize that words can overlap in meaning without being fully synonymous (i.e., have the same range of meaning).

A. Two words that can be used to refer to the same person, object, or event are incorrectly assumed to be equivalent in meaning.[44] For example, it is wrong to suggest that because a Honda Civic can be called a "car" or an "automobile," that the words "car" and "automobile" are equivalent in meaning. A Hebrew example would be to start with the recognition that קָהָל (*qahal*, assembly) can in many contexts be used to refer to the same group of people that is identified by the word יִשְׂרָאֵל (*yisraēl*, Israel).[45] Consider Lev 4:21, "And he shall carry the bull outside the camp and burn it up as he burned the first bull; it is the sin offering for the assembly [הַקָּהָל, *haqqahal*]," and Deut 5:1, "And Moses summoned all Israel [יִשְׂרָאֵל, *yisraēl*] and said to them, 'Hear, O Israel [יִשְׂרָאֵל, *yisraēl*], the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them.'" Even though these two words can be used to refer to the same group of people, the words themselves do not mean the same thing, as is made apparent by the fact that it is not Israel specifically that is in mind in Prov 21:16, "One who wanders from the way of good sense will rest in the assembly [בִּקְהַל, *biqhal*] of the dead." A Greek example would be to argue that μαθητής (*mathētēs*, disciple) and ἀπόστολος (*apostolos*, apostle) mean the same thing because they are both used throughout the New Testament to refer to the twelve whom Jesus chose (cf. Matt 10:1 and 10:2). Even though these two words can be used to refer to the same group of people, they are not equivalent in meaning, or else Luke 6:13 would make very little sense: "And when day came, he

44. Barr, *Semantics*, 217–18; Boda, "Lexical Analysis," 2; Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics*, 122.
45. Cf. Barr, *Semantics*, 124–25.

called his disciples [μαθητὰς, *mathētas*] and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles [ἀποστόλους, *apostolous*]." The semantic ranges of certain words allow them to be used interchangeably in some contexts, even though the words themselves may not mean the same thing (or may not have the exact same range of meaning).

B. Two (or more) Hebrew or Greek words that are translated by the same English word are assumed to have the same range of meaning. To understand what this fallacy is like, we can reverse the situation, and consider two English words that could regularly be translated by the same Greek word. The fact that the English words "Sabbath" and "week" can both be translated into Greek by the word "τὸ σάββατον" (*to sabbaton*) certainly does not mean that "Sabbath" and "week" mean the same thing. A Hebrew example would be to suggest that the words יָד (*yad*) and שָׂפָה (*safah*) mean the same thing, because they can both be translated by the English word "bank." See, for example, Dan 10:4, "On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank [יָד, *yad*] of the great river (that is, the Tigris)," and Dan 12:5, "Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, two others stood, one on this bank [לִשְׂפַת, *lisfath*] of the stream and one on that bank [לִשְׂפַת, *lisfath*] of the stream." Even though יָד (*yad*) and שָׂפָה (*safah*) can both be translated by the word "bank" in certain contexts, these Hebrew words do not have the same range of meaning. In certain contexts, יָד (*yad*) can be translated "hand" (e.g., Dan 8:25), but שָׂפָה (*safah*) cannot. In other contexts, שָׂפָה (*safah*) can be translated "lip" (e.g., Dan 10:16) but יָד (*yad*) cannot. The Greek words πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) and πνοή (*pnoē*) could be said to mean the same thing because they can both be translated by the word "breath" in passages like 2 Thess 2:8, "And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath [τῷ πνεύματι, *tō pneumati*] of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming," and Acts 17:25, "nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all humankind life and breath [πνοήν, *pnoēn*] and everything."[46]

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46. ESV, modified.

Even though πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) and πνοή (*pnoē*) can sometimes both be translated by the word "breath," they do not have the same range of meaning. The word πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) can be translated by the word "spirit" in reference to supernatural beings like unclean spirits (e.g., Luke 4:36), but πνοή (*pnoē*) cannot. Multiple Hebrew or Greek words that can be translated in certain contexts by the same English word do not thereby have the same range of meaning.

   C. Each word is said to have a different meaning than every other word in the language in every single context. [47] This error can sometimes be a result of the assumption that if the entire semantic ranges of two words are not the same, then they cannot be synonymous in any given context. An English example of two words which have no discernible difference in meaning in certain contexts are the words "buy" and "purchase," as in the sentences, "I will buy a new car today," and "I will purchase a new car today." In Hebrew, it would be incorrect to argue that since יָד (*yad*, hand) and שָׂפָה (*safah*, lip) have different ranges of meaning, then they cannot mean the same thing in Dan 10:4, "On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank [יָד, *yad*] of the great river (that is, the Tigris)," and Dan 12:5, "Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, two others stood, one on this bank [לִשְׂפַת, *lisfath*] of the stream and one on that bank [לִשְׂפַת, *lisfath*] of the stream." As a Greek example, the semantic ranges of ἐμβλέπω (*emblepō,* to look at) and ἀτενίζω (*atenizō,* to look intently) are not the same. For example, ἐμβλέπω (*emblepō*) has the idea of "to think about" in Matt 6:26, which is not part of the semantic range of ἀτενίζω (*atenizō*). Yet there is no discernible difference in the meaning of the two words in Acts 1:10–11, "And while they were gazing [ἀτενίζοντες, *atenizontes*] into heaven as he [Jesus] went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking [ἐμβλέποντες, *emblepontes*] into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'" Even though each word has a unique range of

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47. Carson, *Fallacies*, 49–53.

meaning, there are contexts in which two different words can be used synonymously.

D. Two Hebrew words used in a parallelism in the same grammatical location are assumed to mean the same thing in that context.[48] It is common in Hebrew to have two lines of poetry that are similar in form. An English example of a parallelism in poetry is:

> The dogs surround me while snarling,
> Growling comes as the canines encircle me.

The above parallelism has the form ABB'A'. In this passage, the words "dogs" and "canines" are both the subjects of the verbs, and are used synonymously in the context. A similar Hebrew example is found in Ps 22:8 (MT 22:9):

> He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him [יְפַלְּטֵהוּ, *yefalletēhu*];
> let him rescue him [יַצִּילֵהוּ, *yatstsilēhu*], for he delights in him!

Here again we have the same ABB'A' structure, where the Hebrew verbs פלט (*plt*, here Piel) and נצל (*ntsl*, here Hiphil) are used synonymously. The verb-change between the two lines of poetry is for stylistic reasons; there is no noticeable difference in meaning in this context between the two verbs (similar to the case with "dogs" and "canines" above). Although words that share the same grammatical location in a parallelism are often used synonymously, it cannot be assumed that this is always the case. For example, consider the following English parallelisms:

> I leaped for joy;
> I shouted in ecstasy.

And again:

> Your smile radiates a room like a flower in bloom;
> Like a rose at first light, so is your smile when I awake.

In the first example, the second line builds on the first, to create a picture of happiness and joy. "Leaped" and "shouted" mean entirely different things, even though they share the same

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48. Boda, "Lexical Analysis," 3; Carson, *Fallacies*, 47–49.

grammatical location in the parallel lines. In the second example, another ABB'A' structure, "flower" is a more general word, while "rose" is more specific, naming a particular type of flower. In neither case do the words that share the same grammatical location in each parallelism mean the same thing. Consider the Hebrew parallelism in Ps 22:10 (MT 22:11):[49]

> On you was I cast from the womb [מֵרָחֶם, *mērahem*],
> and from the womb [מִבֶּטֶן, *mibbeten*] of my mother you have been my God.

The given English translation makes it appear that רֶחֶם (*rehem*) and בֶּטֶן, (*beten*) are used synonymously in Ps 22:10. Throughout the Old Testament, רֶחֶם (*rehem*) is consistently used for the place where an offspring develops in its mother, both of humans and animals, so is appropriately translated as "womb" in Ps 22:10. However, בֶּטֶן, (*beten*) is used not only in contexts similar to those of רֶחֶם (*rehem*), but also for the abdominal area of men and one animal (with no specific reference to the womb—Job 40:16). For example, Judg 3:21 reads: "And Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his [Eglon's] belly [בְּבִטְנוֹ, *bevitno*]" (cf. Pss 31:9; 44:25 [MT 31:10; 44:26]; 132:11). It seems that בֶּטֶן, (*beten*) can be used for the abdominal region of men, women, and animals, while רֶחֶם (*rehem*) is used more specifically for a female's womb.[50] Thus,

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49. ESV has been modified to more clearly demonstrate the Hebrew parallelism. ESV has: "On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God."

50. It could be argued that בֶּטֶן, (*beten*) refers specifically to the womb when used of women, and to the abdomen only when used of men. In almost every Old Testament passage in which בֶּטֶן (*beten*) is used of women, it is the place in which unborn children reside (Gen 25:23, 24; 30:2; 38:27; Deut 7:13; 28:4, 11, 18, 53; 30:9; Judg 13:5, 7; 16:17; Job 1:21; 3:10, 11; 10:19; 19:17; 31:15, 18; 38:29; Pss 17:14; 22:9 [MT 22:10]; 58:3 [MT 58:4]; 71:6; 127:3; 139:13; Eccl 5:15 [MT 5:14]; 11:5; Isa 13:18; 44:2, 24; 46:3; 48:8; 49:1, 5, 15; Jer 1:5; Hos 9:11 [possibly a metonymy here for pregnancy]; 9:16; 12:4; Mic 6:7), although it is uncertain in some passages whether children are in view (Num 5:21, 22, 27; Job 15:35). However, in many of the above passages, it is difficult to know if בֶּטֶן (*beten*) is the woman's or the man's (e.g., Ps 132:11;

in Ps 22:10, there is a move from the specific in the first line, to the more general in the second line, which can be conveyed in English as follows:

> On you I was cast from the womb,
> And from the belly of my mother you have been my God.

Two words found in a Hebrew parallelism in the same grammatical location may be used synonymously, or there may be a difference in meaning. Only by examining the parallelism itself can the relationship between the words be determined, rather than by simply assuming a synonymous relationship.

6. *Contextual Amnesia*

The sixth fallacy is the failure to recognize that every user of a language is free to make use of the entire range of a word's meaning in different contexts.

A. It is sometimes assumed that an author will use each word with the same meaning every single time. In terms of the Scriptures, it is thus assumed that when the meaning of a word is determined in one context (often the first occurrence of the word), it can then safely be taken as the meaning of that word in every other passage in the same book. As an English example, imagine that the following sentences commence a book:

> Filled with rapture and great delight, I fell to my knees, arms raised
> in adoration of the one whose Word I held in my right hand. As if in

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Prov 31:2). In other words, it is possible that children can be said to come from the man's בֶּטֶן (*beten*), as well as from the woman's (perhaps as the storehouse of semen in men, and the womb in women?).

Furthermore, there are many passages where בֶּטֶן (*beten*) is used of men, and children are not in view (Judg 3:21, 22; Job 15:2; 20:20, 23; 32:18, 19; Pss 31:9 [MT 31:10]; 44:25 [MT 44:26]; Prov 22:18; Ezek 3:3; Hab 3:16), passages where both men and women are *probably* in view, and yet children are not (Prov 13:25; 18:8, 20; 20:27, 30; 26:22), and one passage where בֶּטֶן (*beten*) is used of a woman, and children are almost certainly not in view (Song 7:2 [MT 7:3]). It seems most likely then that בֶּטֶן (*beten*) is best understood as the belly or abdomen of a human in the above passages, probably including the genital region.

a trance, I knelt in that position as I imagined the coming rapture when I would forever be with my Saviour.

The first time it occurs, "rapture" means "ecstatic delight."[51] It would be a distortion of the text, however, to suggest that based upon this fact, "rapture" also means "ecstatic delight" in its second occurrence, rather than the day when believers will be caught up into the clouds to meet Jesus. It is common for people to use the same word with different meanings in a single piece of writing, and sometimes even within the same sentence.[52] As a Hebrew example, the word יוֹם (*yom,* day) is used with two different meanings in Esth 4:16: "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days [יָמִים, *yamim*], night or day [יוֹם, *yom*]." In the first occurrence of יוֹם (*yom*), it refers to a 24-hour period of time, whereas in the second reference it refers to the daylight hours of a 24-hour period of time.[53] A Greek example is Mark's use of the word ἀναβλέπω (*anablepō*), which he first uses in Mark 6:41: "And taking the five loaves and the two fish he [Jesus] looked up [ἀναβλέψας, *anablepsas*] to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all." If an author is required to use each word with the same meaning in its every occurrence, then the following translation of Mark 10:51 needs to be modified, "And Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' And the blind man said to him, 'Rabbi, let me recover my sight [ἀναβλέψω, *anablepsō*].'" In order to be consistent, the man's request to Jesus should read, "Rabbi, let me look up," indicating that he has some medical condition that prevents him from looking up, rather than actually

51. Allen, ed., *Oxford Dictionary*, 614.

52. Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 91–92; Cf. Carson, *Fallacies*, 43–44. For an English example of a word being used with different meanings in the same sentence consider the following: *You can bank on his car sliding into the snow bank on his way to the bank.*

53. יוֹם (*yom*, day) can also be used in the singular in Esther to refer to a 24-hour period of time as can be seen in Esth 3:4: "And when they spoke to him day after day [יוֹם וָיוֹם, *yom wayom*] and he would not listen to them, . . ."

being blind. Yet this suggestion for the meaning of ἀναβλέπω (*anablepō*) in Mark 10:51 is utterly absurd. An author is not required to use each word the same way every time, but is free to make complete use of a word's entire range of meaning.

   B. The way in which one author uses a particular word, either in one or in many contexts, is tacitly assumed to demonstrate what the word means in another author's writings.[54] As an English example of the danger of this error, consider the following sentence, "The church is filled with people who deny the deity of Christ." The implications of this sentence are vastly different depending upon whether by "the church," the author means a particular local church or the entire body of Christ. If it was determined that a respected author consistently uses "the church" to mean the entire body of Christ, it could not then be assumed that this author does the same. For if this author intended a particular local church by "the church" then it would be a complete misrepresentation of what he wrote to suggest that he believes, based upon the above sentence, that a belief in the deity of Christ is not necessary for salvation. A Hebrew example is the word אַף (*'af*), which is often appropriately translated "face" in the book of Genesis. For instance, Gen 3:19 reads, "By the sweat of your face [אַפֶּיךָ, *'appeka*] you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return," and Gen 48:12 says, "Then Joseph removed them from his knees, and he bowed himself with his face [לְאַפָּיו, *le'appayw*] to the earth." Yet the fact that אַף (*'af*) is often used in Genesis to mean "face" is not determinative for the use of the same word by other authors. Proverbs 29:8 says, "Scoffers set a city aflame, but the wise turn away wrath [אַף, *'af*]." It would *not* be more accurate to translate Prov 29:8, "Scoffers set a city aflame, but the wise turn away their face." Carson notes the Greek example of how in Paul's writings, someone who is described by the adjective κλητός (*klētos*, called) is a believer, but this is not true in the book of Matthew.[55] The difference can be seen by a comparison of what

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54. Carson, *Fallacies*, 62–63.
55. Ibid.

Paul says in Rom 1:5–6, "through whom [Jesus Christ] we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called [κλητοί, *klētoi*] to belong to Jesus Christ," and what Jesus says in Matt 22:14, "For many are called [κλητοί, *klētoi*], but few are chosen." There is not a difference in theology between Paul and Jesus, but simply a difference in how the word κλητός (*klētos*) is being used in these passages. Each author is free to make use of the semantic range of any word, and is not limited to the meanings of a word used by some other author, even if both are biblical authors.

7. *You Are What You Speak*

As Carson writes: "The heart of this fallacy is the assumption that any language so constrains the thinking processes of the people who use it that they are forced into certain patterns of thought and shielded from others. Language and mentality thus become confused."[56] Linguistic evidence used to support the supposed thought structure of a particular group of people includes morphology, syntax, and grammar.[57] Particularly significant as a word-study fallacy is the assumption that for each distinct thought there will also be a corresponding distinct word to convey that thought. For example, Barr notes the argument that Hebrew has one word (בָּשָׂר, *basar,* flesh), while Greek has two words (σάρξ, *sarx,* flesh; σῶμα, *sōma,* body) to describe the same object. Based upon this fact, it is argued that the Israelites never asked certain questions that would necessitate a distinction between the body and flesh.[58] The absurdity of this notion can be demonstrated in English with the word "snow." It could be argued that English-speaking people do not have the capacity to distinguish between different white substances that fall from the sky in cold weather that can all be called "snow." The fallacy lies in suggesting that how people view things in their world can

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56. Ibid., 44; cf. Silva, *Biblical Words*, 18–19.
57. Barr, *Semantics*, 38–106.
58. Ibid., 35; cf. 145–46.

be assessed simply with an analysis of the words available to them in their given language.

Conclusion

There are undoubtedly more errors that can be made in the process of a word-study than have been described within this article. The seven word-study fallacies that have been listed, however, are surprisingly common and found in sermons, books, commentaries, and scholarly articles. The intent of this article is not to foster discouragement due to the prevalence of word-study fallacies, but to bring those fallacies to light so that they can be avoided in the future.

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