

1-1-1990

Resources for Teachers

Wendell Willis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Willis, Wendell (1990) "Resources for Teachers," *Leaven*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 18.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol1/iss1/18>

This Resource Guide is brought to you for free and open access by the Religion at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leaven by an authorized editor of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact bailey.berry@pepperdine.edu.



Wendell Willis, Editor

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR CONCORDANCE I: Learning Biblical Definitions

After acquiring several translations of the Bible, one of the first tools for Bible study that most Christians acquire is a concordance to the Bible. Probably most have a concordance to the King James version, most likely either Strong's or Young's.

Probably most concordances are used to locate a Bible phrase or verse that we simply cannot remember. Thus the concordance is really a massive index to the Bible. The second most popular usage is probably to locate Bible teaching on a certain topic (such as "marriage," or "baptism"). These are good purposes, but a concordance is much more useful than this. If you will learn some simple steps you will find your Bible study is both more interesting, more fulfilling, and more individual than simply relying on whatever commentaries or notes you may have.

While there are real advantages to learning to read the Bible in the original languages of Hebrew and Greek, obviously few are going to have the time or opportunity (or diligence!) to do so. However, with an "analytical" concordance you can derive some benefit from the original languages, even if you cannot read them (you will need to be sure that you write the words down **exactly**).

For example, if you wanted to understand the meaning of Christian "hope," you might turn to a contemporary dictionary, such as Webster, and actually be misled more than

helped. Webster's unabridged defines the meaning of "hope" as "to look forward to with desire and **more or less confidence**" (which is a good definition for contemporary English usage, as in our expression, "I hope to make a million on this idea"). Indeed, I suspect the idea of "wish" or "desire" is our most common understanding of "hope."

However, that is not the real meaning of "hope" in the New Testament, as can be easily discerned with a concordance. If you were studying 1 Thessalonians and came upon 4:13, that Christians should not sorrow/grieve "as those having no hope," and turned to look up "hope" in a concordance you would find a number of references. The first task is to determine which Greek word is behind the word hope in this passage. Using your analytical you would discern that it is *elpis* (in Greek,).

A quick review would reveal that in the New Testament this word is almost exclusive to Paul (and thus we can compare Pauline passages to get some idea of his nuance to *elpis*, hope). This would show that for Paul hope is closely tied to "faith" and "love" and also is pointed to the future work of God. None of this, I know, would be surprising.

However, when we look at other uses of *elpis*, there are in Acts three "secular" uses of this word, which may help us perceive more clearly the nature of Christian hope. The first is Acts 16:19, where the owners of the possessed

slave girl cured by Paul are angry because “their hope of making money was gone.” Surely it was not their wish or their desire to profit from this poor woman that vanished, but their expectation of future gain.

In Acts 24:26 we learn that Felix kept Paul in prison for two years, “hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe.” No doubt Felix wished Paul would follow common Hellenistic practice of buying favor with authorities, and, in view of this common practice, he had every reason to expect that would be the case too. Finally in Acts 27:20 we may have the most useful passage of all to help us understand accurately about *elpis*, hope. There we see that the storm at sea threatened Paul’s trip to Rome to such an extent that the sailors as well as Paul’s party “gave up all hope of being saved.” Certainly their wish or desire did not diminish to survive, but their expectation was severely limited due to the storm.

When we look up these other uses of “hope” (*elpis*) in the New Testament we see that its basic meaning, whether in secular or religious speech, is “confident expectation,” we gain a new appreciation for the true significance of Christian hope. Back in 1 Thessalonians 4: 13 we realize that Paul is contrasting the reality of Christian expectation of life beyond death, not

with pagan wishes, but with pagan lack of confidence because they lacked any firm basis of *elpis*.

This little word study of *elpis* will also enlighten us about “hope” elsewhere in the New Testament, in addition. For example, Romans 4: 18 about Abraham, teaches us that with regard to God’s promises, Abraham “expected against all expectations” that in advanced age he would become the “father of many nations.” Or in Ephesians 2:12, that pagan life before the coming of Christ was characterized by “no hope and without God in the world.” Pagans, both ancient and modern, have indicated in art and literature a wish, a desire of a future beyond the grave, but without Christ have no “expectation,” as indeed they realize.

Finally, to do a complete word study, you would need to know that *elpis* is translated once in the KJV by a word other than hope, specifically “faith” in Hebrews 10:23. The next installment of this series will show how you could determine this. At this point let me say simply that if we read Hebrews 10:23 as “hope” rather than faith, and know what we have just discovered about the “expectation” quality of *elpis*, this verse shows a new and significant focus than we may have previously thought.