

Getting Beyond Strong's Concordance 2004

I have been the editor of TNN Online since 1997 (now Messianic Apologetics). Certainly, in this period of time, my understanding of the Bible has changed, and my ability to better understand it from a scholarly perspective has developed, and continues to move forward. I have to admit that when I first started digging into some of the issues that were floating around the Messianic community in the late 1990s, that my knowledge of the Bible was limited to what I read solely in the King James Version and Complete Jewish Bible. Later on, I started using the New American Standard Bible and started consulting software programs with various other English Bible translations. My knowledge of Hebrew and Greek was first limited to what I found in *Strong's Concordance*. Occasionally, I would consult the *Brown-Driver-Briggs* Hebrew Lexicon or *Thayer's Greek Definitions* available in Quickverse.

As I moved forward, however, and entered into college, I knew that I was going to have to do better. I knew that using lexicons and dictionaries would not be enough, and that I would have to have the ability to pick up a Hebrew or Greek Bible and read directly from it, with at least a working knowledge of what I was reading. When I was in college (1999-2003), I took what was available at the University of Oklahoma for a student whose major was not linguistics. I attained a working knowledge of the Biblical languages. When I attended Asbury Theological Seminary for my M.A. in Biblical Studies (2005-2008), I received more targeted instruction on the Biblical languages, and how to use them in exegesis of the Scriptures.

I realize that many of you reading this are not called to service as a full time Bible teacher. To you, you are simply thankful that *others* have committed the time and energy to doing this work. But, many of you still desire to have a slightly deeper understanding of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. *You want to know how you can access these texts a little deeper than an English translation.* Hopefully, when many of you finish reading this article, you can be aware of how there are many excellent Hebrew and Greek resources out there, that you do not have to be a genius to understand.

We face a problem today in much of the broad the Messianic community, because not enough of the teachers and local leaders validate various opinions and conclusions they make about the Bible from credible, well-respected, scholarly resources. One has to clearly understand that something being taught about controversial issues like Torah observance, the restoration of Israel, and in many cases post-tribulationism, runs against much of the flow of what is present in contemporary Christianity. However, even though various Messianic positions may be contrary to some evangelical Christian viewpoints—this by no means justifies

Confronting Critical Issues

us just “throwing stuff together” without any substantiation. Sadly, just as there are Christian Bible teachers who base their teachings solely on the King James Version, or worse, the New International Version, and who rely on the opinion of their constituents to justify what they teach—so is the same similarly true among many in the Messianic community today. One will encounter teaching materials marketed as “Messianic,” which do not have footnotes or a Bibliography. If they actually do, then the author often does not use a standardized documentation format as laid out in the MLA Manual of Style or Chicago Manual of Style. It makes you wonder how the person is documenting the source and whether or not the source is actually credible.

I remember how a while back I was able to meet with a well-respected and scholarly teacher in the Messianic community. I met with him in his office, where he surely had many more books in his reference library than I did. Of course, many of these reference works were compiled over a period of thirty or more years in ministry. As I noticed his books and many resources, and certainly made note of some of the works that I needed to acquire, he made the pertinent observation that “about 80% of all presumed Messianic Bible teachers and leaders in this movement are not qualified.”

What did this Bible teacher mean by “not qualified”? Did he mean that all must have doctorates to teach Scripture? I do not believe so.

No one has to have an M.Div or Th.M or Th.D to be a Bible teacher. You must have the hand of God on your life and be called by Him into His service. You must have a proper heart and honorable intentions whereby you are trying to help people grow in their walk with the Lord and know Him in a better and more intimate way. But certainly, as one must have the hand of God on his or her life to be in ministry, there does come a certain point where one must have training, or at the very least have the proper tools to use as an expositor of the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul, who wrote almost a third of the Messianic Scriptures, was a Rabbi trained by Gamaliel, a revered Sage of Judaism to this very day:

“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today” (Acts 22:3).

There have been some works written in recent days describing the Rabbinical training that Paul had, how he was born in the city of Tarsus in Asia Minor and was taught in Jerusalem, and how he had a strong command of the Hebrew Tanach, but also knew about the larger Greco-Roman world in which he lived. Paul was uniquely trained for later evangelizing not only his fellow Jews, using Rabbinical teaching methods consistent with his time, but also using philosophical teaching methods for getting Greeks and Romans to consider salvation in the Messiah of Israel. Nevertheless, we know that Paul was well-trained, and he “knew his stuff,” so to speak.

Now is Paul the exception? Were the original Twelve Disciples of Yeshua just “stinky fisherman” as is commonly asserted? Were they just “country bumpkins”? More than a few in the Messianic community say that they were, and like to say that they had no formal education or scholarly training. This is often used as a mask to justify poor scholarship and poor handling of the Scriptures. Since there is no Biblical record of Peter, John, or even James the brother of Yeshua going to *yeshiva* or the First Century equivalent of “Bible college,” why should any of us have to worry about it? This is the attitude, sadly, that many Messianics have.

Obviously, the Original Twelve had the hand of God on their lives. They had the call. They had the anointing of the Almighty, and so regardless of their background or upbringing, they were used mightily by the Lord to accomplish His tasks and His assignments. But the problem is where we misunderstand what they did prior to their time of being called out by the Messiah.

Getting Beyond Strong's Concordance

Certainly, many of the Disciples had occupations that involved manual labor and very little "brain power." But if they were involved in the First Century Synagogue, the *beit midrash* or house of study, they were exposed to intense and detailed study of the Scriptures. They may have not been as formally trained as the Apostle Paul, but they would have had a greater training in and exposure to the Scriptures than certainly most people who today attend Sunday school. They would have been exposed to the world around them through the many travelers who came through First Century Israel for commerce.

Today, we face an unfortunate situation where people think they can get away with teaching the Scriptures as those who have little or no formal training, and not only little or no formal training, but are *unwilling* to submit themselves to *any* training whatsoever. Education is sometimes viewed as being a problem, as opposed to a solution. While it is true that education is not always a good thing, as one must have applied knowledge in the workplace or ministry field, if one has no training or does not know about the appropriate tools to use, we can have a serious problem on our hands. We can have a serious problem on our hands because we can be accused by outsiders—namely Christian theologians and Bible teachers who are sincerely intrigued about the Messianic movement—of "making stuff up." I cannot tell you how many times I have run into this problem and have, in the past, had to "make excuses" for some other Messianic Bible teachers. Too many claiming to be "authorities" on particular subjects have especially caused problems in their teachings by exclusively using *Strong's Concordance*.

What do I mean by problems? How can there possibly be any problem with *Strong's Concordance*? After all, how many Bible teachers that you know tell you that all you need is a good King James Bible, a *Strong's Concordance*, and a *Webster's Dictionary*, and that is all you need to interpret Scripture? **If this is what you have been told, then you are sadly mistaken.**

Strong's Concordance was first published in 1890 and compiled by Dr. James Strong, a former president of Troy University and professor of exegetical theology at Drew Theological Seminary. For the time, this work was monumental. Dr. Strong based his concordance on the King James Bible and catalogued important Biblical words, phrases, and concepts. Also included in his concordance was a Hebrew and Greek dictionary. Most importantly, *Strong's Concordance* compiled a numbering system for Hebrew and Greek words that remains in usage well up until this day. Since 1890 *Strong's Concordance* has undergone several revisions, and additional versions based on newer Bible translations like the New American Standard or New International Version have been published. As the preface to the *New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* states, "For over 100 years, Dr. James Strong's monumental work, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, has been the most widely used Bible concordance ever compiled...*Strong's* has stood the test of time."¹ In cataloguing words, Strong took the KJV and manually counted how many times a word like bread, or truth, or light, or blood appeared. However, today this is easily solved with a few keystrokes in a Bible software program, and *multiple Bible versions* can be searched.

Certainly, while standing the test of time can be important, it can also be a problem. It can be a problem if one believes that any one translation of the Bible, or any one reference source or dictionary, is the "end all" to all Bibles or reference sources or dictionaries. It is a problem because our knowledge of Biblical times and of Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Greek is always changing and improving. What we know today in the early Twenty-First Century about the Bible and the languages in which it was originally written, has changed as new scholarship and research, combined with archaeology and renewed contact with the Biblical lands, has

¹ James Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), Publisher's Preface.

Confronting Critical Issues

developed much more. So when it comes to *Strong's Concordance*, and our usage of it, using *Strong's* is only a beginning—not the end. It must be where the Bible student begins first looking at Hebrew and Greek words, but by no means should be where the student stops.

The problem is that we have well known and popular Bible teachers in the Messianic movement, who stop at *Strong's Concordance*. They do not realize that there is a whole world of valuable tools out there that make *Strong's* actually look pretty **weak**. Perhaps what keeps people using *Strong's Concordance* is their familiarity with it, but that familiarity has to be tempered with the reality that *Strong's Concordance* is an incomplete resource.

In my early days of studying the Scriptures in greater detail, I thought that all I needed as far as “in depth resources” were concerned was a *Strong's Concordance*. But when I began to address some of the more complicated theological issues of Messianic doctrine, specifically relating to Torah observance, I quickly discovered that *Strong's* was by no means going to be enough. The prime example I always go back to is how in most Bibles Romans 10:4 is rendered with “Christ is the end of the Law.” I remember reading in David Stern's *Jewish New Testament Commentary* that the Greek word *telos* could also mean “aim,” “purpose,” or “goal.” I went to look *telos* up in the *Strong's Concordance* dictionary and discovered the following:

G5056

τέλος

telos

tel'-os

From a primary word τέλλω *tellō* (to *set out* for a definite point or *goal*); properly the point aimed at as a *limit*, that is, (by implication) the *conclusion* of an act or state (*termination* [literally, figuratively or indefinitely], *result* [immediate, ultimate or prophetic], *purpose*); specifically an *impost* or *levy* (as *paid*): - + continual, custom, end (-ing), finally, uttermost. Compare G5411.

This definition was not very clear to me at all, even though it did say that a related word (verb), *tellō* (τέλλω), meant “to *set out* for a definite point or *goal*.” I knew then that I was going to have to pull my head out of the sand and start looking around for some other more detailed, and better respected, resources.

At the time in 1999, I had Parson's Technology Quickverse 6.0 installed on my computer. Included with Quickverse were *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Definitions* and *Thayer's Greek Definitions*. These were abbreviated versions of the much larger *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* and *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* available as hard copy books. Looking up *telos* (τέλος) in the *Thayer's Greek Definitions* module provided by Quickverse, I saw a wider array of definitions, including the one which Stern had referenced:

G5056

τέλος

telos

Thayer Definition:

1) end

1a) termination, the limit at which a thing ceases to be (always of the end of some act or state, but not of the end of a period of time)

1b) the end

1b1) the last in any succession or series

1b2) eternal

1c) that by which a thing is finished, its close, issue

1d) the end to which all things relate, the aim, purpose

2) toll, custom (i.e. indirect tax on goods)

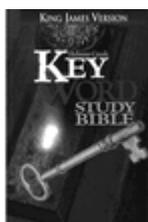
Part of Speech: noun neuter

A Related Word by Thayer's/Strong's Number: from a primary *tello* (to set out for a definite point or goal)

These two new resources I had discovered were actually very easy to use, as they employed the usage of *Strong's Concordance* numbers. All I had to find was the *Strong's Concordance* number for a Hebrew or Greek word, and then find the word in these two new theological resources I had just found. In comparing the definitions provided from the *Strong's Concordance* dictionary to the *Thayer's* dictionary, it is obvious that the *Thayer's* definition is superior. This is what I began to discover as I got beyond *Strong's Concordance*.

As I began to formally study Hebrew and Greek in 2000-2002, my resource array greatly expanded. For about a year, I had relied almost exclusively on the *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Definitions* and *Thayer's Greek Definitions* modules. But I knew that there was more and that my resource library was going to have to expand. I could not simply acquire every Hebrew or Greek lexicon on the market immediately, but I knew that as my abilities to work with these languages grew, so would my resource library have to grow. Each Hebrew and Greek dictionary and lexicon I presently use now in 2013 has its strong and weak points, and that is why I have several of them.

What I would like to emphasize to you as the reader is the need for you, in your Bible studies and examination of the Scriptures, to have a solid array of Bible reference sources that go beyond *Strong's Concordance*. While I do not consider myself an expert when it comes to Biblical Hebrew and Greek, **I have learned from experience that *Strong's Concordance* is by no means enough in order to access these languages.** There are resources available at your disposal, which are not expensive or cost-prohibitive, and many of them are available as modules in many Bible software programs today. In the remainder of this article, I will discuss some tools that I highly recommend for any Biblical student for his or her reference library. Hopefully, if you are an aspiring Messianic Bible teacher, you will take note of these materials and begin adding them to your library if you have not already done so. If you already have some of them, but are still only using *Strong's Concordance*, hopefully you will take them off the shelf, blow the dust off, and begin using them again.



Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible New American Standard

edited by Spiros Zodhiates (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1994)
ISBN: 0-89957-684-2

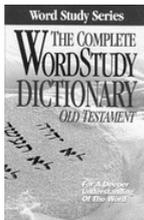
The *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* is a resource that some of you are probably already familiar with. It was a resource that we had in our family library which I started taking notice of very quickly when I began my detailed examinations of the Bible in 1999. As soon as I started using it in early 2000 as my primary Bible, a new world of Biblical research was opened up to me and I could scarcely put it down.

I recommend that every one of you have a copy of the *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* in the New American Standard (even though it is also available in the King James Version and New International Version). I recommend NASB because it is the most literal Christian Bible translation on the market today, and as such alternative renderings of Hebrew and Greek words can be easily inserted. What makes this Bible an excellent resource is that each book is preceded by an introduction, setting the theme of the book, there is a running commentary for important passages, and it is laced with many cross-references. Most important of all, key words are underlined with their *Strong's Concordance* reference number provided. In the back of the

Confronting Critical Issues

Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible are lexical aids to both the Old and New Testaments. These include selective definitions of various Hebrew and Greek words, but the definitions are elongated and important to consult. Also included at the very back is a *Strong's Concordance* dictionary.

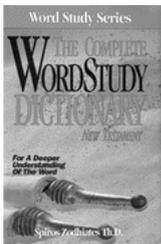
While the only complete Hebrew and Greek dictionary is a *Strong's* dictionary, and is limited, this Bible is nevertheless a great stepping-stone for the Bible student. You can easily look up most Hebrew or Greek words, and with their *Strong's Concordance* number, find more detailed definitions in other well-respected theological works. A nice place to start in the Bible itself is the lexical aids section, which is expanded in two dictionaries, one for the Old Testament and one for the New Testament, produced by AMG Publishers.



The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament

edited by Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2003)
ISBN: 0-89957-667-2

This dictionary includes an expanded version of the Hebrew definitions included in the Old Testament lexical aids section of the *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*. These definitions of Hebrew words are detailed, but are not too complicated to understand. Not only is a definition of a Hebrew word provided, but also a brief theological explanation is given. While I use *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* often in a supplementary role to some of the other resources I consult, I have nonetheless found it as a valuable reference source, and think that you will as well.



The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament

edited by Spiros Zodhiates (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993)
ISBN: 0-89957-663-X

Among some of the Greek dictionaries I have consulted, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* has been rather useful. What makes this dictionary useful is because it includes detailed definitions of Greek words, with some theological significance. The definitions are not difficult to understand. And, more than anything else, its editor, Spiros Zodhiates, is a native Greek. I recommend this resource for every reference library, and think that it is a worthwhile investment on your behalf if you really have no intentions of learning any rudimentary Biblical Greek.

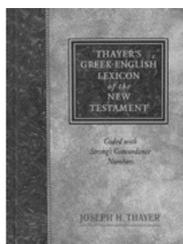


Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon

edited by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles Briggs (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003 reprint)
ISBN: 1-56563-206-0

The *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* has been widely considered to be one of the most comprehensive lexicons on Biblical Hebrew available on the market. It was first produced in 1906, and since then has undergone numerous reprints. This lexicon is based on the work of the German Hebraist Wilhelm Gesenius, who helped to first formalize the study of Biblical Hebrew lexicography. The *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* provides detailed definitions of Biblical Hebrew words, their usages in Biblical Hebrew, and will often explain cognate words in Aramaic, Syriac, or Arabic, and how they are often translated in Greek and Latin translations of the Hebrew Scriptures. This is a very popular work with Bible students, and because of its longevity it is required for any theological library.

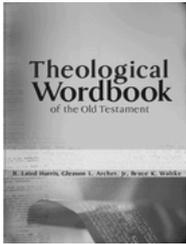
I recommend using the hard copy book much more than just the electronic *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Definitions* which will only tell you the definitions of Hebrew words, as opposed to giving you the definitions and then a summary of how they are used in the Biblical text. The printed version available from Hendrickson Publishers does have each word keyed to a *Strong's Concordance* number, but since the words are in syntactical order (*not* alphabetical order) in Hebrew, the *Strong's* numbers are not numbered consistently. Also included at the end of the *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* is a summary of Biblical Aramaic words.



Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament

edited by Joseph H. Thayer (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003 reprint)
ISBN: 1-56563-209-5

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament by Joseph H. Thayer has been considered to be a popular Greek lexicon available for college students. This partially has to do with its inexpensive price tag ranging from \$15-\$25, but also because it is relatively thorough and easy-to-follow. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* first appeared in 1885, and the edition printed by Hendrickson Publishers is the fourth edition of 1896. This lexicon is intended to be used by both who are experts in Biblical Greek, as well as those who are novices or do not even know any at all. *Thayer's* definitions are detailed, there is often not a theological definition given, but there is a summary of usages of various Greek words in the New Testament, paralleling usages in the Septuagint, and in some cases even usages of Greek words in classical works or writings of the Church Fathers. Each of the words is keyed to its *Strong's Concordance* number, and most of the words are in the same order as *Strong's Concordance*, with some minor exceptions.

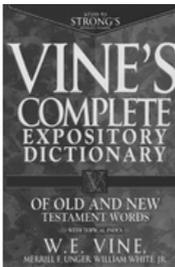


Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (2 vols)

edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke
(Chicago: Moody Press, 1980)
ISBN: 0-8024-8631-2

The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* is intended to be an intermediary book between Hebrew lexicons such as *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, and much more extensive works such as the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* which runs into many volumes. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* is a resource whereby each Biblical Hebrew word of the Scriptures is dissected, examined from a linguistic perspective, and then examined from a theological perspective. Each word is examined in much greater detail than most theological dictionaries employed, as the editors discuss how Hebrew words are used in Scripture, what the original writers of the Hebrew Bible were likely meaning when they used them, and how theological value judgments have been made from the usages of these words.

This is an evangelical Christian theological resource, and as such Hebrew words will be examined from the perspective of how they foreshadowed the coming Messiah and/or other beliefs expressed in the New Testament. When I need a detailed, but not overwhelming, definition and explanation of a Hebrew word, I go to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. I believe that because of its non-overwhelming nature, you will find it to be a valuable resource. Do note that the words are keyed to their own numbering system, but in the back of the second volume is a conversion chart for *Strong's Concordance* reference numbers.



Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words

edited by W.E. Vine (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996 reprint)
ISBN: 0-7852-1160-8

Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words is widely recognized as being one of the most concise, yet complete, available dictionaries of Greek words used in the Apostolic Scriptures. W.E. Vine, a British Greek scholar, is widely recognized as having been an expert in the field of Biblical Greek studies. The *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* appears in a similar format to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, whereby Greek words are listed, defined, examined from an historical perspective, and compared with other Scriptures. Vine, when necessary, also goes into usages of Greek words in the Septuagint and classical materials. His definitions and explanations are not difficult to follow, yet are thorough at the same time. Do note that words, rather than being listed alphabetically in Greek, are instead classified under their English usage, as you will see Greek words for "authority," "truth," "word," etc., listed under their common English counterparts. This can be easier to look up, but does have some limitations if you are unfamiliar with Biblical Greek.

The present edition printed by Thomas Nelson also includes *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words* by Merrill F. Unger and William White, Jr. This is a Hebrew dictionary for the Tanach in a similar format to *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, and is similar in scope to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, except probably not as detailed.

Getting Beyond Strong's Concordance

The Hebrew and Greek resources I have just examined are obviously not all of the available scholarly resources on the market today. Some additional tools that I widely use, include: Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001); William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988); H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). These are all lexicons that I would especially recommend that you have in your personal or congregational resource library. However, unlike those which I have previously listed, every one of these tools requires that you be able to read Biblical Hebrew or Greek. There are no *Strong's Concordance* numbers that you can use as a kind of "crutch," to coach you in accessing these resources.

Hopefully, in seeing some of the other, more detailed, better equipped, and more up-to-date Hebrew and Greek resources I have listed in this article, your theological library will be expanding, and you will be able to do more in depth and valuable studies of the Scriptures. I know that when I finally got beyond *Strong's Concordance*, and started examining some of the better tools available for Bible study, that my perspective of the Scriptures changed, and I was better able to discuss and defend my beliefs. I think the same will be true when you get beyond *Strong's Concordance* as well, and examine the world of better theological resources available for the Bible student. You are going to have to—sooner or later if you are a Messianic Bible teacher—because we have to start holding our faith community to a higher theological standard, **and that standard is not found in only using *Strong's Concordance*.**

Bibliography

- Baker, Warren and Eugene Carpenter, eds. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2003).
- Brown, Francis, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003).
- Harris, R. Laird, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).
- Strong, James. *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995).
- Thayer, Joseph H. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003).
- Zodhiates, Spiros, ed. *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1994).
- _____. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993).