As you begin the project, spend some time living and praying with your text. Read it through several times, slowly and meditatively. Ask God to help you get to know the text better. At this point you should avoid rushing toward assumptions about the meaning of the text. Take it as an opportunity to settle yourself in for a long, deliberate journey of abiding with the passage (Jas.1:22-25).

It will serve you well to start gathering a folder of study materials. You’ll add to this folder over the course of the quarter, and the more careful you are about the gathering, the easier it will be to produce your papers. You might start by printing out a hard copy of the passage to mark up with all your notes and observations. Early on you should become perfectly clear about where the passage falls in the plotline of the gospel: what comes before, and what comes after? You mustn’t ever study a passage in isolation from its larger literary context. In order to get to know the meaning of your passage for today, you must begin by figuring out the role your passage plays in the larger gospel story.

Before we turn to the specific learning activities of this assignment, let me offer up an exhortation about the task of engaging in biblical studies research. You are about to begin digging through piles and piles of reference works and studies on your passage. You could conceivably gather data from a pile of inanimate and inert objects, but instead I’d invite you to imagine yourself as a participant, sitting at a great big table with hundreds of others who have gathered together to study your passage. Some of the people at the table are still alive. Others are dead, though they lived in your lifetime. Still others have been dead for centuries. All of them are there together with you, a great cloud of witnesses, working together to help the church hear God’s word. This is more than just an assignment for a college course: it is a great privilege to engage this task, and it calls for all the diligence and attentiveness you can muster. Forget about trying to be a scholar. Do not strive for originality. Join the community of those participating in God’s work through scripture for the edification of the church.

Here’s a key point in this regard: one of the most important indicators of understanding yourself as a participant in scripture study is the care with which you cite your sources. Think of your research as a kind of written transcript of the conversation you hear around the table. So and so says this; someone else responds by saying that; when I hear them I think this. Each voice deserves its own footnote. Indeed, it is not unusual in scholarly books and articles to find hundreds of footnotes, sometimes one for every sentence! Four things to say about this:

First, you must constantly keep careful notes of all the information you can find about the book, article, or reference work you’re consulting. When I take study notes, I always begin by jotting down the work’s entire bibliographic information. From there, each note below is headed off by a page number. Later, when I go back to write up my findings, I’ve got all the reference information I need right there in my notes. Otherwise you’ve either got to go back and look it up again or include an incomplete citation in your paper. The former will slow you way down; the latter will lose you points when it comes to assigning a grade. Keep good, thorough notes.

Second: in biblical studies, the most appropriate citation form is the footnote. In contrast to social-science methods, where studies are frequently referenced in simple parenthetical notes listing author and year of publication, the humanities’ appeal to large, substantial studies requires more information, and you can’t include it all in a simple parenthetical note. Use footnotes.

Third, keep in mind that footnotes aren’t simply a place for listing the author, text, and page number of the work you’re referencing— they are also a place to “continue your conversation” with the reader. In a footnote you can provide additional information that is not absolutely necessary in the main body of the text, e.g. personal reflections, clarification on the source, or discussion of detailed minutiae that substantiate a
more general claim made in the main body of the text. Ultimately, solid, extensive footnotes are an important way of communicating your full engagement with your sources and your reader.

Finally, the folks around the table comport themselves according to an agreed-upon set of table manners. A guide to these manners is provided for you in the form of the *Society of Biblical Literature Handbook of Style*. A student’s version is available in PDF and has been uploaded to blackboard. In this handy document you’ll find all you need to know about proper format for transcribing the conversation you’re having with your tablemates. Do yourself a favor: download a copy and either keep the electronic file handy or print the whole thing out and keep it in your research folder. Please note: I will not tolerate sloppy, incomplete citations that disrespect your tablemates.

Many blessings on your research this quarter!

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**PART ONE**

Part one of your project consists of the following points. It is worth 20 points and will be submitted on Canvas.

1. **TRANSLATIONS**
   - Consult five different English translations of your passage and list all significant differences you find. Among the five there should be at least one relatively literal translation (e.g. New American Standard Bible, Revised Standard Version), one relatively dynamic (e.g. Today’s English Version, New Century Version), one that shoots for the middle (NRSV, NIV), and one other (e.g. New King James Version, New Jerusalem Bible, English Standard Version). Avoid *The Message* or *The Living Bible*.
   - Where the translations agree, it suggests that the underlying Greek is fairly straightforward and there are no major discrepancies in the textual tradition. Variation suggests that the Greek isn’t as easily interpreted into English, and/or there are discrepancies in the textual tradition (if you’re using a study bible, the notes may inform you of this). It is also possible, of course, that the theological concerns of the translator have had an effect on the translation.
   - Also, be sure to note also where the English translations structure your pericope differently. The verse numbers are fixed, but paragraph breaks are determined and subject headings are added by contemporary editors. Do the translations structure your pericope differently? Are there different titles?
   - Write up your findings: (1) Tell me what translations you’re using; (2) List off all the major differences found among the translations; (3) offer comment on the potential interpretive significance of each difference. That is, how might the differences affect our understanding of the verse? Please note: this will usually absorb at least one and a half pages of single-spaced writing. Some of you will want to simply list off the relevant differences in bullet-point fashion. Others will prefer to provide a complete comparison, in five columns, with the significant differences marked off by color or font. The latter model is not required, but is preferred insofar as it will help you show me that you’ve done a thorough job. Of course, doing so will take several pages, not just 1-1/2. If you do employ the column approach, make sure you still isolate the differences you consider significant and offer up some commentary on their potential interpretive significance.

2. **WORD STUDY**
   - Working from one translation (please let me know which one it is!), list off all the words in your passage that seem significant to you, along with a sentence or two explaining why it is you think that word might be worthy of investigation. How do you know what words are significant enough to merit investigation? Here are some suggestions for determining candidates for further study:
     - Any word that seems ambiguous or unclear, especially those that can have more than one meaning.
o Any word that is repeated in your pericope or is known to be a word used frequently in the gospel as a whole (a concordance will tell you this). Check synonyms of the word while you’re at it; such word groups often form motifs within a book.

o Any word that gets translated in different ways in the English versions.

o Any word that appears in your passage but turns out to be a rare word in the NT as a whole. This is especially the case if your word is a hapax legomena, i.e. it occurs only once in the NT.

o Any word that you think you already know because it is a common NT or Christian word.

I should think you’d be able to come up with around 10 candidates for further study. After you’ve generated your list and explained your choices (one full page?), do parts 2a and 2b.

2a. CONCORDANCES

• To study how a word is used in the Bible, you’ll need to use a concordance, which are located in the reference section of the library. The problem with most English concordances, of course, is that they track the use of English words that may or may not correspond to the underlying Greek word (e.g. there are multiple words for “love” in Greek, but the English concordance simply lists the one word “love”).

The easiest way for non-Greek readers to study the underlying language is to use an online resource like the Blue Letter Bible. Look up your pericope on the website and click the “C” icon to the left of the verse. Find the word you want to search, and click on the number between the English and Greek words. Note: the Lexicon (which provides a definition of the word) is quite out of date, so skip over it and look at the concordance results. I repeat: do not rely on either the “Outline of Biblical Usage” or the “Thayer’s Lexicon” for your definition of the word being investigated. You need to do your own concordance work: Vine’s Expository Dictionary and the other resources are NOT the resources you need.

• Here’s the key thing to keep in mind when reading concordance results: words find their meaning primarily from the way they are used in context. Usage ultimately determines meaning; meaning does not always determine usage. So, when you look at the way the word is used in the passages unearthed in your concordance, look to see if there are words, themes, synonyms, genres, or specific contexts regularly associated with your word (you must of course look at the larger context and not just the immediate verse in which the word is found). Perform your search in concentric circles: first analyze uses of the word in the book you’re studying, then expand to look at uses by the same author (for the gospels, this means looking at both Luke and Acts, both John and 1-3 John), then go to books of related genres (all four gospels), and finally to the entire New Testament. While you’re primarily looking to see how the word is used, it is also worth noting how often the word is used: is it common, or rare? If it is rare, you’ll eventually want to investigate what accounts for its use by this writer. Of course, if the word is used numerous times it would take forever to analyze the usage in every context. If this is the case, at least get a good look at how the word is used in your text and how it is used in the particular book where your text is found.

• You will choose one significant word from your passage and submit it to a complete concordance study. Summarize your findings in at least one page, concluding with any thoughts you have about how the study helps you understand your word in context. Be sure to include a complete bibliographic entry of the concordance you used.

2b. DICTIONARIES/ENCYCLOPEDIAS/WORDBOOKS

• Get to know more about your key word by using three Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, lexicons, or theological wordbooks. At least one must be Greek-based. Choose from among the following good options:
  o Greek-based:

  - English-based:

  - More advice:
    - Do not go to the dictionaries without having discovered the underlying Greek of the word you’re exploring! This is crucial for at least two important reasons: (1) sometimes a translation will add a word in English that isn’t there in the Greek in order to improve the sense for us, and (2) sometimes the underlying Greek word can be translated in multiple ways, so you could conceivably be studying one possible meaning of the Greek term, and not the full sense of what is implied in the text.
    - This should go without saying, but you should keep digging through the dictionaries until you find three that offer up something on your word. Let me especially recommend the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, as it is sure to have an article on any word of relevance in the Greek NT. If you’re having any trouble finding resources for your word, contact me or Steve Perisho in the library.
    - This part should really be a substantial component of your paper, as this is your chance to hear from the experts. Do not skimp on the research here!

  - Write up your findings with a concluding summary (what did you learn and how is it helping you to understand your passage?), referencing all three of your sources throughout and including full bibliographic data at the end.
    - Note that the information provided above is a library reference code, not a bibliography. Do not simply copy and paste what I’ve provided here. Use the SBL guide.