

SOTERIOLOGICAL CONCERNS WITH BAUER'S GREEK LEXICON

MICHAEL D. MAKIDON

Director of Publications
Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, Texas

I. INTRODUCTION

A good dictionary not only tells you what the range of meaning for a given word is, it also provides examples of the term's usage over a cross-section of literature. All who study the Bible are especially grateful to have dictionaries, or lexicons, which do just that.

While there are a number of dictionaries for the Greek NT,¹ one has stood out—*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Erwin Preuschen first published the German edition in 1910; however, during his second revision he was met with an untimely death. Walter Bauer continued Preuschen's work, publishing a second edition. Finally, Bauer published the third edition in 1937 with his name alone on the title page. He would later revise his work printing three more editions.

The first English edition (BAG) was printed in 1957 while Bauer was completing his fifth revision. Thus, it was based on the fourth German edition.

In 1979, after twenty-two years of silence, the University of Chicago published the second English edition of Bauer's Greek Lexicon (BAGD),² which was based on Bauer's fifth German edition. It has since served as the standard Greek lexicon for pastors, teachers, and scholars

¹ Ethelbert William Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, 8th ed. (London: Lamp Press, 1957); *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, ed. Harold Keeling Moulton, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978); and *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Barclay Moon Newman, Jr. (London: United Bible Societies, 1971).

² *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, eds. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, 2nd ed. (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

who teach the NT from its original language. With careful lexical and semantic descriptions, the second edition has served as a solid tool for understanding the usages of Koine Greek words.

In 2000 a third edition (BDAG) was printed—self-described as “revised and edited by Frederick William Danker based on Walter Bauer’s”³ 6th German edition and the previous English editions (BAG 1957 and BAGD 1979).

Most assume that since Danker was involved in the second and third editions that the latter edition has not seen significant change. However, a recent article by Vern S. Poythress in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*⁴ demonstrates that Danker has been greatly affected by political factors, revealing the need to take a focused look at this new edition in other areas of study as well. This article will compare and evaluate Danker’s revisions of three entries in BAGD that are of particular interest to soteriology.

II. TO BELIEVE OR TRUST (*PISTEUŌ*)

Two significant changes between BAGD and BDAG occur under the word “to believe” (*pisteuō*).

BAGD offers several glosses: 1) Believe; 2) Trust; 3) To be convinced; 4) Entrust; and 5) Have confidence. With almost two pages of examples, it overwhelmingly reaffirms the biblical usage of *pisteuō*—to trust or believe in someone or something.

BDAG presents much of the same material as BAGD. For the majority of its discussion, the third edition remains equally clear. Nonetheless, a little leaven can ruin a whole batch of bread.

The first major change is the title and definition of section 2:

BAGD – *believe (in), trust* of religious belief in a special sense, as faith in the Divinity that lays special emphasis on

³ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), iii.

⁴ Vern S. Poythress, “How Have Inclusiveness and Tolerance Affected the Bauer-Danker Greek Lexicon of the New Testament (BDAG),” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (December 2003): 577-88. Poythress demonstrates through quotes by Danker in the foreword and in individual entries that BDAG has been adversely affected by inclusiveness and tolerance.

trust in his power and his nearness to help, in addition to being convinced that he exists and that his revelations or disclosures are true. In our literature God and Christ are objects of this faith.⁵

BDAG – To entrust oneself to an entity in complete confidence, *believe (in), trust, with implication of total commitment to the one who is trusted.* In our literature God and Christ are objects of this type of faith that relies on their power and nearness to help, in addition to being convinced that their revelations or disclosures are true.⁶

Danker has blended the two concepts of belief and commitment into one. The second major change is Danker's explanation in section 2b:

BAGD – (*oi*) *pisteusantes (those) who became Christians, (the) Christians, believers* Ac 2:44; 4:32; 1 Th 1:10a; 2 Cl 2:3; Hs 9, 19, 1.⁷

BDAG – (*oi*) *pisteusantes (those) who made their commitment = (those) who became believers, (the) Christians,* Ac 2:44 v.1.; 4:32; 2 Th 1:10a; 2 Cl 2:3; Hs 9, 19, 1.⁸

For good exegetical reasons, BAGD did not contain the addition “(those) who made their commitment,” which Danker equates with the phrase “(those) who became believers.” This is clearly a theological bias rather than a semantic or lexical decision.⁹

⁵ BAGD, “*pisteuō*,” 661.

⁶ BDAG, “*pisteuō*,” 817, emphasis added.

⁷ BAGD, “*pisteuō*,” 661.

⁸ BDAG, 817.

⁹ Although the verbs *to believe* and *to commit* do slightly overlap in meaning, they are generally two lexically different concepts. When one believes, he himself enters into the state of trust in something or someone. When one commits something to someone else, he trusts himself or another object to that person. While one can commit his eternal destiny to Christ (i.e., trust Him for eternal life), Christians generally speak of committing their life to Christ (i.e., deciding to follow Christ in obedience). The English word *commit* can employ either nuance. Unfortunately, Danker is not abundantly clear.

One of the texts Danker cites in support of this addition is Acts 2:44. Let's compare the NKJV versus an interpretive translation of vv 44-45 using Danker's concept of commitment:

NKJV – Now all who believed (*oi pisteuontes*)¹⁰ were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

Hypothetical Danker Version – Now all who *made their commitment* were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

The second hypothetical translation, which employs Danker's view, is decidedly biased. It looks as if Luke was merely talking about people who were committed to each other. Danker has made an interpretive decision that is lexically unsupported. What Danker has done is import his theology into the lexical definition of *pisteuō*. This is not the job of a lexicographer—even a good translator should avoid this practice.

It is clear that these individuals, who were described as believers, were also committed to each other (vv 44b-45). Yet, to import a contextual concept into the lexical meaning of the verb *to believe* is truly biased translation, which hides the meaning of the verb *pisteuō* and Luke's stated intention—to describe them as believers. After all, he used the verb *proskartereō* (to be devoted or committed) in v 42. He could have easily used this verb once again, making an emphatic parallel.

If I wrote a letter to a Christian friend and said that there were believers in my church that fixed my plumbing, would the letter convey the same meaning if I merely said that plumbers came and did plumbing work at my house? Not all plumbers believe in Christ and not all believers are plumbers. For this reason, Luke specifically identifies the individuals in Acts 2:44 as believers who were also committed (v 42).

Danker also cites 2 Thess 1:10a as support for this gloss. Paul describes Christ's second coming as, "when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among *all those who believe*" (emphasis added). For Danker to equate *believing* with *committing*

¹⁰ Literally "the believing ones."

further demonstrates his theological bias. These are clearly two different concepts.

III. TO BE DECLARED RIGHTEOUS (*DIKAIŌ*)

BDAG's exposition of *dikaioō* is longer than that of BAGD due to some added material:

BAGD – of God's activity Rom 3:26, 30; 4:5 (on *dikaioun ton asebeē* cf. Ex 23:7; Is 5:23); 8:30, 22 (Is 50:8); Gal 3:8; Dg 9:5. For the view (held since Chrysostom) that *dikaioō* in these and other passages means "make right" see Goodspeed 143-6, JBL 73, 54, 86-91.¹¹

BDAG – *dikaioō ergois* by (on the basis of) works, by what one does 1 Cl 30:3; cp. Js 2:21, 24f (***ergon 1a* and *pistis 2dδ***); *di eautōn dikaioō* by oneself = as a result of one's own accomplishments 1 Cl 32:4. (cp. *kata nomon* Hippol., Ref. 7, 34, 1).—Since Paul views God's justifying action in close connection with the power of Christ's resurrection, there is sometimes no clear distinction between the justifying action of acquittal and the gift of new life through the Holy Spirit as God's activity **in promoting uprightness in believers**. Passages of this nature include Ro 3:26, 30; 4:5...¹²

Given this usage of *to be declared righteous*, it is clear that for Danker justification and the promotion of "uprightness" are one and the same. The reference to *ergon* (1a) and *pistis* (2dδ) will provide further clarification. While Danker has not made any changes to these entries, the significance lies in the fact that they have been newly linked to *dikaioō*.

For the word *ergon* under "that which displays itself in activity of any kind, deed, action" (1a), BDAG states:

A similar contrast between the *poiētēs ergou* doer who acts and the forgetful hearer Jas 1:25, and between *erga* and a *pistis* that amounts to nothing more than a verbal statement 2:14–26.¹³

¹¹ BAGD, "*dikaioō*," 197.

¹² BDAG, "*dikaioō*," 249.

¹³ Ibid., "*ergon*," 390.

This reference to righteousness further demonstrates Danker's view that justification cannot be separated from works.

Under the word *pistis* section 2dδ "state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted, *trust, confidence, faith*," BDAG notes:

faith as fidelity to Christian teaching. This point of view calls for *erga* as well as the kind of *pistis* that represents only one side of true piety: Js 2:14ab, 17, 18abc, 20, 22ab, 24, 26 (*ergon* 1a); Hv 3, 6, 5; s 8, 9, 1ab.¹⁴

If there was any doubt what Danker meant by *commitment* in the previous section, this entry should clear it up. Faith under section 2dδ is defined as faithfulness to Christian teaching, which calls for work as well as faith. In Danker's view, there is a direct relation between justification (which combines God's acquittal of man and the Holy Spirit's work of bringing uprightness [faithfulness] in those He justifies), faith (fidelity or faithfulness to Christian teaching, which calls for work), and works, which cannot be separated from faith.

While neither the concepts of faith nor works were clear in BAGD, righteousness has been immersed in works in BDAG. This is a grave trend.

IV. TO DISOBEY, DISBELIEVE (*APEITHEŌ*)

The apostle John wrote,

He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God...He who believes [*ho pisteuōn*] in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe (*ho apeithōn*) the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him (John 3:18, 36).

It is clear in John 3 that those who believe have everlasting life but those who don't are condemned. Interestingly, John uses the verb *apeitheō* (to disobey, disbelieve) in v 36a in contrast to *pisteuō* (to believe) in v 36b. The following is BAGD's explanation:

BAGD – since, in the view of the early Christians, the supreme disobedience was a refusal to believe their gospel,

¹⁴ Ibid., "*pistis*," 820.

apeitheō may be restricted in some passages to the meaning *disbelieve, be an unbeliever*. This sense, though greatly disputed (it is not found outside our literature), seems most probable in J 3:36; Ac 14:2; 19:9; Ro 15:31, and only slightly less probable in Ro 2:8; 1 Pt 2:8; 3:1, perhaps also vs. 20; 4:17; IMg 8:2.¹⁵

Disagreeing with the previous version, Danker revised this paragraph to read:

BDAG – In a number of passages NRSV and REB [New Revised Standard Version and Revised English Bible], among others, with less probability render *apeitheō* “disbelieve” or an equivalent.¹⁶

Yet, John 3:36 and Acts 14:2 clearly juxtapose belief and disobedience (disbelief). Acts 19:9 has a clear contrast as well. Luke writes,

And he [Paul] went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, *reasoning* and *persuading* concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were *hardened* and did *not believe* [*ēpeithoun*], but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-9, emphasis added).

Luke's two contrasts are clearly evident (reasoning/hardened and persuading/disbelieving). If one will not respond to *reasoning*, he is *hardened*. If one will not be *persuaded*, he is *disbelieving* (disobedient to the message of eternal life).

V. CONCLUSION

The job of a lexicographer is an arduous task. He first must compile the various usages of a word and then sort them into categories. His job is not merely to supply definitions but usages, which are demonstrated in their respective contexts. A lexicon serves as a tool for theologians and exegetes. Therefore, it should include raw data in need of interpretation.

For the most part, those who teach the NT from the original language have come to trust Walter Bauer's lexical work. Many take the research

¹⁵ BAGD, “*apeitheō*,” 82.

¹⁶ BDAG, “*apeitheō*,” 99.

for granted because of the sweat and toil men have invested in this project over their lifetimes. While much of the research is invaluable, teachers would be well advised to make sure that it corresponds with Scripture before making lasting judgments. The Greek words *pisteuō* (to believe), *dikaioō* (to be declared righteous), and *apeitheō* (to disobey or disbelieve) bear this out.