Analyzing Prepositions (and Conjunctions)

Based on the discussion above regarding prepositions and their critical role in logical argument and propositional relationships, Level 3 Lexical Analysis is the place to provide more guidance in that same framework. It is also the place to include a discussion of the closely related grammatical item, conjunctions. Remember that conjunctions and prepositions both are broadly considered types of adverbs, along with negative particles and interjections.

When analyzing prepositions and conjunctions, it should first be decided if the function of the preposition or conjunction is that of its basic, grammatical usage, or if it is being used within a logical argument. Usage, as always, is a determining factor of meaning based on context.

Plain, grammatical usage
For prepositions, the initial consideration is with noun cases, whether explicit as in Greek or implicit based on word order and word construction, as in Hebrew. If the preposition is functioning as a basic grammatical connector, the student must note what the preposition is pointing to or connecting in order to show a relationship. As noted in Chapter 9, prepositions show a relationship between other words, so those other words need to be identified, and then the relationship can be determined.

Often, the words within the scope of a preposition will be two nouns, such as, 1) *the house on the hill*. In this case, the nouns *house* and *hill* are being related by location, using the preposition *on*. At times the words within the scope of the preposition will involve other parts of speech, such as in the example of 2), "*this is the message which we have heard from Him*" (1 John 1:5). In this case the verb *heard* is related to its source, *Him*, by using the preposition *from*.

In their plain, grammatical function, prepositions can show the relationship between words in many ways, such as described in Table 71.

Table 71 - Prepositions in Grammatical Relationships

Relationship	Description	Example
Location	place, either geographic or metaphysical	in the temple; in the spirit
Manner	the way in which something is done	in anger; in love
Means	the means by which something is done	by law; by grace
Time	when something is done	on Monday; in the morning
Extent/direction	destination, limit, or direction of movement	into the house; to the church; from you

As stated, the grammatical relationship in example 1) above is clearly that of location. The grammatical relationship in example 2) can be seen as extent/direction, but it would be best to add clarifying remarks, such as the antecedent of Him being the source or origin of the message that was heard and that the apostles (John is using first-person plural to indicate the original recipients of Jesus' teaching) were the ones hearing the message.

The relationships in Table 71 above should call to mind the ideas of case in the Greek noun system. Table 26 in Chapter 9 listed and described cases and case functions, reproduced here:

Case Form	Case Function
Nominative	Subject
Accusative	Object
Genitive	Possession, Relation
Dative	Indirect Object, Location, Instrumental
Vocative	Direct Address

The noun system in Greek is already well equipped to express ideas such as location, instrumentality, possession, and so on. Usually context is clear enough to express the intention of the biblical author, but with the addition of prepositions in the sentence, clause, or phrase, the intended meaning is that much more focused. The preposition will not necessarily make the intended meaning completely unambiguous, but it goes a long way in that direction.

By examining the grammatical usage of prepositions and comparing the function of cases (when used with nouns and/or adjectives), the student should be able to discern and firmly state the intended use of the preposition and the words within its scope. At the least, the student will be able to exclude meanings not possible in light of the grammatical construction used. This is due to how restricted some prepositions are in the case(s) they may be used with.

For example, the Greek preposition διὰ (dia), often glossed as *through*, can only be used with the genitive or accusative cases. That means that the student, while considering the various nuances associated with each of those cases, can set aside the ideas of indirect object (dative case) or the idea of expressing the subject of a sentence (nominative case). These ideas, however, quickly "bleed" into semantic ideas that are not dependent on simple, grammatical structure (see "Logical relation usage" below).

In examining the grammatical usage of prepositions as discussed, it is easily seen that prepositions (and conjunctions) are the best suited part of speech to convey logical relationships and to construct logical arguments. Once a preposition extends its function beyond its plain, grammatical usage, it is time to classify its use in other ways.

Logical relation usage

For this type of usage, prepositions and conjunctions are usually described in terms of sentence transitions and connectors. It is typical to observe how arguments (logical reasoning) use prepositions, conjunctions, and other particles, to establish a set of premises and then state a conclusion. For example,

1) If A, done through B, is X,
2) And if B, from C, is not through D,
3) We conclude, therefore, that E, F, and G are only by means of B.

The example above is not a formula to be used in any way other than to illustrate how prepositions, conjunctions, conditionals (*if*), adverbs (*only*), and so forth, take on major roles in expressing precise, narrowly defined functions within arguments. 1) through 3) are copied here with the key logical connectors bolded and underlined:

1) **If** A, done **through** B, is X,
2) **And if** B, **from** C, is **not through** D,
3) We conclude, **therefore**, that E, F, *and* G are **only by means of** B.

The argument above may be analyzed grammatically, but the grammatical construction is primarily providing a framework for expressing logical and propositional relationships. A sample list of possible logical and propositional relationships follows in Table 72 below. Note that some of the relationships are the same as in Table 71. The primary difference between the tables relates to how the preposition or conjunction is being used: in a simple grammatical construction or within a logical argument.[1]

Table 72 - Logical, Propositional Relationships

Relationship	Description	Example
Agency	the person or people doing the act (personal, impersonal; intermediate, ultimate); personal means	"by," "through"
Causal	grounds, reason	"because," "for"
Means	how something was done	"by"
Manner	the way in which something was done	"with," "in"
Purpose	why something is/should be done	"in order to," "so that"

---

[1] Note that many logical operators are used in informal dialog but still make up an argument. Making a point and coming to a conclusion often does not make use of formal argument constructions where underlying premises are identified and a conclusion is introduced with words such as, "in conclusion," or "therefore." It is difficult at times to realize that an argument is being presented, but careful observation of the way in which a passage is constructed will lead the student to understand that the text does, in fact, contain a set of premises and a conclusion.

Condition/ consequence	possible, probable, improbable, etc.	"if … then," "if," "since,"
Temporal	time reference	"after," "then," "before"
Comparison	compare/contrast	"as … so," "as," "like"
Conclusion	result of reasoning/argument	"therefore"

Prepositions have been discussed a few times in the preceding chapters and twice in this chapter, and we have now added the dimension of considering conjunctions. These discussions have brought us to the end of the scope of this book and a little beyond. It is hoped that the student is interested and intrigued enough to pursue studies in the areas of logic, formal argumentation, faulty reasoning, and propositional relationships. These all provide extremely valuable insights into exploring the meaning and intention of any passage of Scripture. For now, we will provide a template for evaluating prepositions at Level 3 of Lexical Analysis.

Analysis Template for Prepositions (and Conjunctions)

1. Using a literal English translation, note the words within the scope of the target word. Depending on what is being modified, write out the properties of the affected parts of speech or the function of the phrase, clause, or sentence. Is the preposition (or conjunction) being used in its plain, grammatical function, or is it part of a logical argument? Find the target word in the BH interlinear and note any grammatical markers, its gloss, and Strong's number. Note also the grammatical markers for the words within the scope of the preposition.

2. Based on the English translation and interlinear glosses, and with an initial survey of other passages using the preposition in same/similar and different ways (which will include the same and different words, phrases, or clauses within its scope), what is the central idea (core meaning) of this preposition *in its context*? What noun case is used by this preposition, and how is the use of the preposition adding to the idea of the case?

3. Using Tables 71 and 72, what type of preposition (or conjunction) is the target word, and how is it being used? How does its use contribute to its meaning and the meaning of what is within its scope? Consider both tables and whether the preposition is being used in a basic grammatical function or in a logical construction.

4. Write out the BDAG (for Greek) or BDB (for Hebrew) entry and any subentries that represents the primary meaning of the preposition. Write a preliminary conclusion for the meaning of your word in context. This will, of necessity,

include remarks about case, grammatical usage or logical/propositional usage.

5. Using Webster's, skim through the primary entries for the target word and write down the entry numbers for the possible meanings most similar to how it is used in your passage, then narrow your list to the entry that most closely means the same as you found in BDAG/BDB.

6. Use Roget's or Webster's to find the most relevant synonym study for your preposition, if any can be found. Write out a paragraph that explains the similarities and differences between the most relevant synonyms and which one in particular most clearly explains the meaning of your target word. Synonyms for prepositions may be difficult to find, depending on their usage, so a worthwhile exercise would be to include a discussion that compares the usage of your target word with other prepositions that would fit into the sentence, clause, or phrase. For example, if the preposition is translated as *by*, how would the words, *in*, *through*, or *from* change the meaning of the expression?

7. Write out a *thorough* conclusion for the meaning of your preposition and its use in context. Include key concepts from the context of your passage and the author's intention for using this particular word. Identify whether the preposition is being used in a simple grammatical construction or if it is part of a logical argument. Your conclusion needs to show a grasp of the grammatical usage in context, similar and different usages, and the nuances involved with similar terms or alternate prepositions (as suggested in #6 above). This should include any insights from the historical, cultural, and literary context of your passage, its author, and the original audience. Your final statement should firmly assert what the author meant in his use of the term within the construction where it is used. Since prepositions show a relationship between other words, your conclusion also needs to discuss how and why the term is being used with the particular words or phrase or clause. Why was the preposition used at all? How would the sentence, clause or phrase be impacted if the preposition were not present and the author, instead, depended on case alone? Could the sentence, clause or phrase be expressed in any other way? If so, why use the construction as found in your passage?