

QUESTION #20 – What is a preposition?

A preposition is a word that is used with a noun or pronoun that relates it to other words or a word in a sentence to form a prepositional phrase. **The preposition always has a noun or pronoun as its object.**

It is called preposition which is “pre-position.” It is in a pre-position because it normally is placed just before a noun or pronoun. **The noun or pronoun that the preposition precedes is called the object of the preposition. The combined use of the preposition with the noun or pronoun is called prepositional phrase.**

Most prepositions function adverbially but they give much more information about the noun or pronoun than an adverb can and may function adjectively. Floyd Barakman gives a good example of this: “The boy **in the yard** ran **in front of a car**.” The prepositional phrase “in the yard” modifies the boy like an adjective and the phrase “in front of a car” modifies ran like an adverb (*How to Interpret the Bible*, p. 35).

Prepositions stress direction and motion in various relationships and connection between things. Often a preposition will be added to a verb in Greek to give more information about the action.

Roy Zuck, in his book *Basic Bible Interpretation*, gives a good breakdown of prepositions taken from the book of Ephesians. It shows the direction and motion and data about various things:’

- 1) A preposition may express means **by His blood**.
- 2) A preposition may express accompaniment, **with Jesus**.
- 3) A preposition may express location, **in Him; on the earth; at Ephesus**.
- 4) A preposition may express benefit, **for His glory**.
- 5) A preposition may express motion, **to heaven; from the dead**.
- 6) A preposition may express direction, **toward us**.
- 7) A preposition may express origin, **the word of God**.
- 8) A preposition may express a characteristic, **the Father of Glory; the Holy Spirit of Promise; the Day of Redemption**.
- 9) A preposition may express identity, **pledge of our inheritance**.
- 10) A preposition may express position, **over all; at His right hand**.
- 11) A preposition may express permeation, **through all**.
- 12) A preposition may express entrance, **into the lower parts**.
- 13) A preposition may express opposition, **against the devil’s schemes**.
- 14) A preposition may express conformity, **according to the flesh**.
- 15) A preposition may express time, **before the foundation of the world**.

(Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, p.113)

God's inspired word in the New Testament contains over 10,000 prepositions (we count 10,384), so they are extremely important to communicate God's inspired, written word. In fact, they are critical to doctrine and theology. God begins His word in both Hebrew and Greek with a prepositional phrase: "**In** *the* beginning." This phrase adverbially modifies the verb "created."

Some of the main prepositions in the New Testament are:

- 1) "up" used 13 times (ana)
- 2) "against" used 22 times (anti) - often something in exchange for something else
- 3) "before" used 47 times (pro)
- 4) "with/together" used 126 times (sun)
- 5) "for/over" used 149 times (huper) - often instead of or in behalf of
- 6) "from/beside" - used 194 times (para) - alongside of
- 7) "under" used 220 times (hupo)
- 8) "about/around" used 333 times (peri)
- 9) "among/amid" used 469 times (meta)
- 10) "down from/according to" used 473 times (kata)
- 11) "from" used 646 times (apo) - separation from edge of something; moving away from
- 12) "through/because of" used 667 times (dia)
- 13) "to/toward" used 700 times (pros) - near in sense of facing toward something
- 14) "on/upon" used 890 times (epi)
- 15) "out of or out from" used 914 times (ek) - out from within something
- 16) "into" used 1767 times (eis) - go into something
- 17) "in" or "within" used 2752 times (en) - Paul uses the expression "in Christ" 164 times

There are three important questions to ask and answer about the preposition:

- 1) What does the preposition word actually mean?
- 2) What is the preposition connected to?
- 3) What is the prepositional meaning in the Biblical context?

In **Matthew 20:28**, Jesus says He came "to give His life a ransom "**for**" many." He says exactly the same thing in **Mark 10:45**. The preposition "for" is huper. This is a critical preposition and critical preposition phrase because Jesus, in the context, is explaining why He came.

Now the preposition huper means that Jesus Christ, who is above all and over all, came to take the place of sinners so they may be saved. This preposition is critical to Christ's substitutionary work because it shows **He is over all as God and as God takes our place to pay our sin debt**. Paul uses that preposition in **II Corinthians 5:14**—saying that Christ "died **for** all."

In **Galatians 3:13** Paul uses prepositions to really emphasize the work of Jesus Christ:

Christ redeemed us "from" (ek) out from within the curse of the law.

Christ became a curse "for" (huper) us that is He took our place in our behalf.

These prepositions are critical to the substitutionary work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(67)

This preposition direction chart is taken from Dana & Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 112 and Dan Wallace, *The Basis of New Testament Syntax*, p. 162.