Ancient Hebrew Research Center

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[E-Zine Home Page](#)

Issue Index

Biblical Word of the Month - Davar

By: Jeff A. Benner

Last week's word of the day "dor" introduced the Biblical Hebrew concept of "order". In this week's issue we will examine the Hebrew root דבר (davar). Notice that the same rd parent root meaning, "order" is also found within this "adopted root" (a three letter root derived by placing another consonant within the parent root).

The word "davar" is commonly found in the Biblical text meaning "speak" as in the phrase "vayidaber YHWH el moshe l'mor" (and YHWH spoke to Moses saying). The ancient Hebrew understanding of "speaking" or a "speach" is an ordered arrangement of words. The feminine form of this word is דברה (devorah) and is the name Deborah, but also means "bee". A bee hive is a colony of insects that live in a perfectly ordered society.

Another common word derived from the root davar is מדבר (midvar) meaning a "wilderness". In the ancient Hebrew mind the wilderness, in contrast to the cities, is a place of order. Many people today live in the cities, a place of hurrying, rushing and busying ourselves with all the day-to-day tasks and high crime. The city can easily be seen as a place of chaos.

On the other hand, when we want to "get away from it all" and slow down and really rest we go out to the "wilderness" to camp. We take walks out into the woods or sit by a lake and feel the peace in these places. These are places of order where all of nature is in a perfect balance of harmony.

The word דבר (davar) may better be translated as "order" as in the phrase "And YHWH gave orders to Moses saying". A commanding officer does not speak to his troops. he has formulated his action plans and has determined the best means to have these plans carried out. Once all of this is determined, he gives his "orders" to his troops. These orders are "an ordered arrangement".

The phrase "Ten Commandments" does not actually appear in the Hebrew Bible, instead it is aseret ha<u>devari</u>ym" and is literally translated as "ten orders". The "Ten Commandments" are our orders from God (the general). They are an ordered arrangement of ideas that if followed will bring about peace and harmony.

Name of the Month - Israel

By: Jeff A. Benner

This name has been translated several different ways including "he wrestles with God", "Prince of God", "he struggles with God", and several others. The name "Israel" is actually a complete sentence in one word. The name has three components - Y, SR and AL. The "Y" is a prefix meaning "he". The "AL" usually pronounced as "el" is the Hebrew word for "God". The "SR" is the part that seems to cause most of the problems in translation.

The Hebrew word "SR" literally means "turn the head". It is often translated as "prince" or "ruler", one who turns the head of the people. The feminine form of this word is "SRH" or "Sarah". Abraham's wife Sarah was very beautiful and probably "turned the head" of the men who saw her. Another word related to "SR" is "yasar" meaning "discipline". When you discipline your children you are turned their head from a path of bad to a path of good.

Because the "Y" is in front of the word "SR" we know that this is a verb and not a noun (this is standard Hebrew grammar) and can literally be translated as "he turns the head of God". The way I like to understand this is that when Israel (either Jacob or his descendents) speaks to God, God, the father of Israel, stops what he is doing and turns to his son and says "What do you want my son".

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