

# Ancient Hebrew Research Center

## Biblical Hebrew E-Magazine

*February, 2005*

*Issue #012*



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### **Biblical Word of the Month - Soul**

By: Jeff A. Benner

What is the soul? Webster' Dictionary gives the following definition. "The spiritual nature of humans, regarded as immortal, separable from the body at death, and susceptible to happiness or misery in a future state." In most cases people will understand the soul through this definition. But, as I have so often stated, our interpretation of Biblical words should be from a Hebraic perspective, not a modern western perspective such as English.

The Hebrew word translated as "soul" is the word nephesh (Strong's #5315). If we look at the various ways in which this word is translated in an English translation, such as the KJV, we will see a wide variation in its interpretation. Some of these translations include; soul, life, person, mind, heart, creature, body, dead, desire, man, appetite, lust, thing, self, beast, pleasure, ghost, breath and will. What exactly does this word mean?

I had always assumed that only humans had a soul but, it was during a study of the word "soul" that I discovered that translations often influence how we interpret Biblical concepts. In Genesis 2:7 we find that man is a "living soul" and in Genesis 1:21 we find

that animals are "living creatures". When I first started using a concordance to look up the original Hebrew words I was amazed to find out that these two phrases were the identical Hebrew phrases - nephesh chayah. Why would the translators translate nephesh chayah as "living soul" in one place and "living creatures" in another? It was this discovery that prompted me to learn the Hebrew language.

In the Hebrew mind we are composed of three entities; body, breath and mind. In future issues we will examine each of these but for now let us simply make some general definitions for them. The body is the flesh, bones and blood, the vessel. The mind is ones thoughts and emotions. The breath is ones character, what makes a person who they are.

The soul is the whole of the person, the unity of the body, breath and mind. It is not some immaterial spiritual entity it is you, all of you, your whole being or self.

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### ***Name of the Month – Red Sea***

By: Jeff A. Benner

After the Israelites were delivered out of Egypt they camped at the "Red Sea". When the chariots of Pharaoh arrived the waters of the "Red Sea" were parted and the Israelites crossed over into safety on the other side.

The "Red Sea" is actually a misnomer from the translation of the Hebrew. The Hebrew is ים סוף (yam soph). The Hebrew word ים (yam) means "sea" and when used alone refers to the Mediterranean Sea. Another Hebrew word is derived from this word, it is the word יום (yom) meaning day. In the Hebrew reckoning of time, the day begins at sunset. At sunset the sun sets in the west and into the Mediterranean Sea.

The word סוף (soph) literally means "edge". This can be the edge of a country (border), the lips as the edge of the mouth, or an outline of something. In the Biblical text this word is used for "reeds" which line the banks, or edge, of rivers. Hence, the "yam soph" is the "Sea of Reeds" or "Reed Sea". Somewhere in time the "Reed Sea" became the "Red Sea".

This same word, "soph", is used in Jewish theology in the term "eyen soph" (with just a vowel change). The word "eyn" means "without" and "soph" means "edge" or "definition" (as an outline). The phrase "eyn soph" means "without definition" and is used for God, the one who has no definition, outline or form.

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### ***Question of the Month – Acrostics?***

By: Jeff A. Benner

**Q:** What is the significance of the words Aleph, Beyt, etc found through Psalm Chapter 119?

**A:** Psalm 119 is divided up into twenty-two parts. At the beginning of each part (in some translations such as the King James Version) is the name of a Hebrew letter. The first section is called aleph; the second is beyt, and so on. This Psalm is what is called an acrostic psalm. An acrostic is where each verse begins with the next letter of the alphabet such as in the following example.

Apples are good  
Berries are sweet  
Cherries are round  
Dandelions are yellow  
Eggplants are large etc.

There are several Psalms like this. Psalm 119 is unique in that the first 8 verses all begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the letter aleph. The next 8 verses all begin with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the beyt. This is form of Hebrew poetry. Other forms will be discussed in future issues.

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### ***Verse of the Month – Genesis 15:6***

By: Jeff A. Benner

I have heard many times "it is not important to have to know the Hebrew meanings of words, the English is good enough for complete understanding". Is this an accurate statement? I don't think so. Anyone who has worked with translation knows that it is often difficult to convey an idea from one culture into another. Not only is this a problem with contemporary languages, but imagine how much more this is compounded when translating from an ancient eastern language into a modern western language.

In order to demonstrate the difference between an English translation of a Hebrew passage of the Bible we will examine Genesis 15:6. Below is this verse from the King James Version of the Bible.

***And he believed the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness***

In order to have a complete understanding of this verse from the Hebrew I have included the definition of each word from Webster's Dictionary.

And: Together with or along with; in addition to; as well as

He: Used to refer to the man or boy previously mentioned or implied

Believe: To accept as true or real

Lord: A man of renowned power or authority

He: Used to refer to the man or boy previously mentioned or implied

Count: To include in a reckoning

It: Used of a nonhuman entity

To: To the extent or degree of

Him: Used as the object of a preposition

Righteousness: Morally upright; without guilt or sin

Let us now interpret Genesis 15:6 based on the fuller meaning of each of these English words.

*And Abraham accepted the renowned one of authority as real; and the included this as a reckoning to him for a moral uprightness.*

Below is this verse from the Hebrew text of the Bible followed by a transliteration of the passage.

וְהֵאֱמַן בַּיהוָה וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לוֹ צְדָקָה׃

And he believed in Jehovah; and he reckoned it to him for righteousness. (ASV)

**וְהֵאֱמַן (ve-he-e-miyn)**

1. The first prefix is the letter ו (V), usually translated as "and", is used in Hebrew to continue a story with a new thought. There are no periods in the Hebrew text and one story is written as one long sentence with the letter ו dividing the story up into segments. While this story (Genesis 15:1-17) is divided up into sentences with periods at the conclusion of almost every verse in English, in the Hebrew each verse begins with the letter ו.

2. The root word here is אמן (aman). This word means "to be a firm support".

3. The second prefix is the letter ה (H) and indicates subject of the verb is "third person, masculine, and singular" and that the verb is "perfect tense, active voice, causative mood". I know this may sound confusing but it is fairly simple. The subject of the verb is "he", the third person, and masculine, singular pronoun. The verb is in the perfect tense meaning completed action and similar to our "past" tense. It is in the active voice in contrast to the passive voice. The active voice of "cut" is "to cut" while the passive voice of "cut" is "to be cut". The causative mood means "to make" or "to cause" the action of the verb. With all of this said, the best translation of this Hebrew word would be "he made a firm support".

4. Note that simply looking up this word in Strong's dictionary will not supply all of these nuances of the word; it will simply give you the definition of the root word.

**בַּיהוָה (ba-yhwh)**

1. The prefix ב (B) means "in" as well as "with" in the sense of being with someone else.

2. The word יהוה (YHWH) is the name of God whose pronunciation has been understood as Yahweh, Yahueh, Yahuah, Yehovah, Yahveh and many other possibilities. I should note here that in Hebraic thought it is not the pronunciation of a name that is important,

but that you know the character (the Hebrew word *shem* means character but is translated as "name") of the individual. The root of this name is הוה meaning "to exist".

### וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ (vay-yach-she-ve-ha)

1. The first prefix is the letter ו (V), again separating a thought within the story.
2. The root word is חשב (chashav) meaning to design. This is a designing of pattern or plan for creating an invention or a plan of action.
3. The suffix ה (H) means "her" and is referring to the final noun, which is feminine, in this verse.

### לו (lo)

1. The prefix ל is the preposition meaning "to" or "for".
2. The suffix ו is the pronoun "him".

### צִדְקָה (tse-da-qah)

1. The Hebrew word צדקה (tsedeqah) comes from the root word צדק (tsadaq) literally meaning "to be straight". This word is in contrast to another Hebrew word meaning crooked. The word meaning "crooked" is usually translated as "perverse" and the word צדקה is usually translated as "righteous". Notice the original concrete understanding of these words (straight and crooked) compared to the western abstract concepts (perverse and righteous). One who is "righteous" is one who walks a straight path (moral and upright). One who is "perverse" is one who walks a crooked path (immoral and crawling).

The following is a literal rendering of this verse from its Hebraic meaning.

And he made a firm stand with YHWH (the fully existent one), and he designed a straight path for him.

Now that we have examined the fuller meaning of this verse using both the English and the Hebrew, I ask you, "Can examining the Hebrew text brings out a better understanding of the text?"

Another passage in the book of Genesis shows that Abraham's "aman" (belief) is related to his action of a firm stand and will be discussed in the next issue.

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