Ancient Hebrew Research Center

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Biblical Word of the Month - Fear

By: Jeff A. Benner

This Hebrew noun is used forty-five times and is most frequently translated as fear. In our English language fear is a state of excitedness, in a negative way, toward something terrible. Before we look at the Hebraic meaning of this word we will examine its use in the common context of "the Fear of the Lord" which appears twenty-seven times.

Proverbs 15:33 (RSV)
The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility goes before honor.

The common understanding of this verse is that if one is afraid of the Lord he will have wisdom but, as we shall see this is not consistent with its use in the Hebrew language. The Hebrew for this phrase is יראת יהוה (yirat Yahweh). When two nouns are placed together they are in the construct state meaning that these two words should be considered one. Another clue that these two nouns are in the construct is the change of

the letter ה (h). When the first word of the construct phrase ends with the letter ה (h), it changed to the letter ת (t).

Below is a complete list of construct phrases from the book of Genesis where the second word in the construct is "the Lord" (Yahweh).

The Word of the Lord (Genesis 15:1)
The Voice of the Lord (Genesis 3:8)
The Face of the Lord (Genesis 4:16)
The Name of the Lord (Genesis 4:26)
The Eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8)
The Garden of the Lord (Genesis 13:10)
The Angel of the Lord (Genesis 16:7)
The Way of the Lord (Genesis 18:19)
The Mount of the Lord (Genesis 22:14)

You will notice that in every instance the first word in the construct (word, voice, etc) belongs to the second word of the construct (Yahweh). The "fear" in the phrase "the fear of the Lord" is not our fear; it is the Lord's fear. Because God cannot "fear" we must look to the Ancient Hebrew concrete meaning of this word to understand it.

The word yirah comes from the parent root yar which means "to flow" and is related to words meaning river and rain, from their flowing, and to throw in the sense of flowing. From this we can see that when one is afraid the insides begin to shake, a flowing of the insides. But as the word yirah means "to flow" it is not limited to "fear" alone.

In our introductory verse we saw that wisdom comes from this "fear of the Lord." Compare that with Exodus 31:3 - "And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship." It is "the Spirit of God (the Lord)" that gives us wisdom in the same way that "the fear of the Lord" does. The Hebrew word for "spirit" is "ruach" literally meaning the "wind," which is also a flowing. The "fear of the Lord" is his Spirit which flows out of him into us giving us wisdom, knowledge and understanding.

Name of the Month - Gabriel

By: Jeff A. Benner

The name Daniel is pronounced Dah-nee-eyl in the Hebrew text of the Bible. This name is composed of two words - דני (dah-nee) and אל (eyl). The Hebrew word דן (dahn) means a judge. When the letter י (iy) is placed after a noun, the noun becomes first person possessive hence, דני (dah-nee) means "my judge." The word אל (eyl) literally means one of power and authority but is usually translated as "God." When these two words are combined into the proper name Daniel it means "my judge is God."

Question of the Month – Final letters?

By: Jeff A. Benner

Q: When were the final five letters added to the Hebrew alphabet?

A: To answer this question a little history of the Hebrew alphabet is needed. Originally Hebrew was written with pictographs, what has become known as Paleo-Hebrew. When Israel was taken into Babylonian captivity they adopted the Aramaic script for most of their writing. This Aramaic script is actually the origin of the Modern Hebrew script used today. Technically the Hebrew alphabet used today is not Hebrew, it is Aramaic. When Israel adopted the Aramaic script it included the five final letters, called sofit in Hebrew, as found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. When Aramaic began using these final letters appears to be a mystery.

Verse of the Month – Exodus 20:1

By: Jeff A. Benner

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וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֵאמֹר:

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And God spake all these words, saying, (ASV)

וַיְדַבֵּר (vay-da-ber)
The verb root דבר means "speak." The prefix י identifies the verb as third person, masculine, singular and imperfect tense - he will speak or he speaks. The prefix ו means "and" but also changes the tense of the verb from imperfect to perfect - he spoke.

אֱלֹהִים (e-lo-hiym)
The base word is אלוה (e-lo-ah) meaning "one of power" or "God." The suffix ים (iym) identifies the noun as a masculine plural - Gods or God (Hebrew plurals can be quantitative - more than one, or qualitative - large or great). Because this noun follows the verb it is the subject of the verb, the "he" in "he spoke."

אֵת (eyt)
This word precedes the definite object of the verb.

כָּל (kol)
This word means "all."

הַדְּבָרִים (ha-de-va-riym)

The base word is דבר and is the noun form of the verb seen in the first word of this verse. This base word means a "word." The prefix ה means "the." The suffix ים identifies the noun as a masculine plural. הדברים means "the words."

הָאֵלֶּה (ha-ey-lah)

The base word אלה (ey-lah) means "these." The prefix ה means "the." The phrase האלה הדברים (the words the these) is translated as "these words."

לֵאמֹר (ley-mor)

The verb root אמר (a-mar) means "say." The prefix ל (ley) means "to" and identifies the verb as infinitive. לאמר means "to say."

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

And the great one of power spoke all these words saying

In following issues we will continue with this chapter.

Mechanical Translation Excerpt - Genesis 7:1-6

1 and YHWH said to No'ahh come, you and all your house to the vessel given that I saw you are a correct one before me in this generation **2** from all the pure beasts you will take to you seven, seven of the man and his woman and from the beast which is not pure she is two of the man and his woman **3** also from the flyer of the sky seven, seven of the male and female to keep alive the seed upon the face of all the land **4** given that for days yet again seven I will make a precipitating upon the land forty days and forty nights and I will wipe away all the substance I did from upon the face of the ground **5** and No'ahh did just as all that YHWH much directed him **6** and No'ahh was a son of six hundred years and the flood had existed, waters upon the land

For details on this new translation see the web site at
http://www.mechanical-translation.org

AHRC Website Excerpt – 1st C. Hebrew

Although the survival of Hebrew as a spoken language until the Byzantine Period is well-known among Hebrew linguists, there remains a lag in awareness among some historians

who do not necessarily keep up-to-speed with linguistic research and rely on outdated scholarship. Nevertheless, the vigor of Hebrew is slowly but surely making its way through the academic literature. The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls distinguishes the Dead Sea Scroll Hebrew from the various dialects of Biblical Hebrew it evolved out of, "This book presents the specific features of DSS Hebrew, emphasizing deviations from classical BH."The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church that once said in 1958 in its first edition, Hebrew "ceased to be a spoken language around the fourth century BC", now says in 1997 in its third edition, Hebrew "continued to be used as a spoken and written language in the New Testament period". An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew says, "It is generally believed that the Dead Sea Scrolls, specifically the Copper Scroll and also the Bar Kokhba letters, have furnished clear evidence of the popular character of MH [Mishnaic Hebrew]." And so on. Israeli scholars now tend to take it for granted that Hebrew as a spoken language is a feature of Israel's Roman Period.

The entire article can be found at http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/18_firstcenturyce.html