

Bite Size Bible Study

Soul / Hear #182

By Pastor Lee

When we read a translation of an original author's words we often lose some of what that author was trying to tell us. This is true when we read our Bibles.

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew. It has been translated to our language, where often our words have a different meaning or don't completely transmit the entire thought of the original author.

From time to time I want to highlight some of these words that often fall into this category.

Soul / Nephesh

Today's first word is Soul – in Hebrew it is *Nephesh* (Strong's 5315).

Whenever we run across this word, we each have a different understanding of what it means.

We are not the only ones confusing this word. The KJV translates the original word 753 times. Here are the words that they used to translate it: soul (475x), life (117x), person (29x), mind (15x), heart (15x), creature (9x), body (8x), himself (8x), yourselves (6x), dead (5x), will (4x), desire (4x), man (3x), themselves (3x), any (3x), appetite (2x), miscellaneous (47x).

Many people confuse it with spirit, which was a different word in the original language. The openbible.org gives a pretty good definition of each:

- "Your soul speaks of your inner-life in relation to your own experience: your mind, heart, will, and imagination. It also includes your thoughts, desires, passions, and dreams.
- But your spirit speaks of the same inner-life in relation to God: your faith, hope, love, character, and perseverance."

Nephesh is the unity of various parts of a person's or creature's body. It includes thought processes such as the mind, emotions, and personality (if that creature is capable of them) as well as the body, blood, organs and so on. It means the wholeness of the being.

As used for a human:

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (Nephesh). Gen 2:7 KJV

As used for a creature:

So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing (Nephesh) with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. Gen 1:21 KJV

Hear / Shema

Our second word today is *Shema*, (Strong's H8085) Which means to hear intelligently, often with implication of attention and obedience. As is true with many Hebrew words, this hearing includes understanding coupled with action.

The KJV translates *Shema* with the following words: hear (785x), hearken (196x), obey (81x), publish (17x), understand (9x), obedient (8x), diligently (8x), shew (6x), sound (3x), declare (3x), discern (2x), noise (2x), perceive (2x), tell (2x), reported (2x), miscellaneous (33x).

The Shema is a centering prayer many Jewish believers have spoken every day in order to focus their attention on God rather than the things of this world. It is not only to hear from God but to put into action what they hear.

"Sh'ma, Yisra'el! Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad [Hear, Isra'el! Adonai our God, Adonai is one]; and you are to love Adonai your God with all your heart, all your being and all your resources. These words, which I am ordering you today, are to be on your heart; and you are to teach them carefully to your children. You are to talk about them when you sit at home, when you are traveling on the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them on your hand as a sign, put them at the front of a headband around your forehead, and write them on the doorframes of your house and on your gates. Gen 6:4-9 CJB

Bottom Line

Obviously we never have the time or resources to check each word we read in our Bibles. When we are doing our general reading we will not need to check each word.

As you can see each of today's Hebrew words includes many English words. As you read one of these English words, mentally check to see if other English words may apply to the reading. Often it will open new avenues of understanding.

But as we get more used to these words we can recognize and recall the more complete idea of the words that the author had in mind. When we are delving into a particular verse or story it can be useful to our understanding to look up key words and mentally reword what we are reading.

One good source I have found is the Blue Letter Bible <https://www.blueletterbible.org>. Some of the information above has been pulled from this site.