

Bite Size Bible Study

Confusing Words #118

By Pastor Lee

When words travel from one culture to another they sometimes take on a new meaning. This often happens with Hebrew to English translations.

Heart

The English word “heart” can be a concrete concept, meaning the organ that pumps blood, or an abstract concept, meaning an emotion such as love or kindness. The Hebrew word *levav* [H:3824] and its parent root *lev* [H:3820] also concretely mean the heart organ. However the abstract concept behind these words is “thought” rather than “emotion” as can be seen in the following verses

Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind (levav), and thou shalt think an evil thought: Ezekiel 38:10 (KJV)

But I have understanding (levav) as well as you; I am not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these? Job 12:3(KJV)

Let men of understanding (levav) tell me, and let a wise man hearken unto me. Job 34:34(KJV)

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind (lev). Isaiah 65:17(KJV)

In the original pictographic script for the word *lev* the first letter represents the shepherd staff, a sign of “authority” and the second letter represents the house or tent, meaning “within.” When combined, these pictographs mean “the authority within.” The “authority within” us is the heart, the mind. The connection between a thought and the heart and its evil inclination can also be found in:

The mind (lev) is crooked above all things, it is sick, who can know it? Jeremiah 17:9

Yahweh saw that the evil of man was great in the land and all the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart/mind (lev) is only evil all the day. Genesis 6:5.

Deuteronomy 6:5 says we are to keep our minds and thoughts on God alone.

And you shall love Yahweh your Elohiym with all your heart/mind (lev) and with all your soul and with all your resources.

Western thought considers the mind more rational than the heart. So, translations which treat *lev* as heart, with the abstract concept meaning an emotion such as love, may be misleading.

Kidneys

One of the most frustrating aspects of the English translations of the Bible available to us is their complete lack of consistency in translation of Hebrew words. In our previous discussion concerning the heart, we should be able to assume, whenever we see the word “heart” in a translation, it is the Hebrew word *levav* or *lev* but as we shall see this is not the case.

Examine me, O Jehovah, and prove me; Try my heart (kilyah) and my mind (lev). Psalm 26:2 (ASV)

The Hebrew word behind the word “heart” in this translation is *kilyah* [H:3629], meaning the “kidneys”, while behind the word “mind” is the word *lev*, meaning the heart organ. The word *kilyah* means “kidneys” and this is the seat of emotion in Hebrew thought.

Intestines

I delight to do thy will, O my God; Yea, thy law is within my heart. Psalm 40:8

So, what is the Hebrew word behind this word “heart,” *lev* or *kilyah*? Neither. This is the Hebrew word *me'ah* [H:4578] literally meaning the “intestines.” In Hebrew thought this is the seat of the unconscious mind, instinct.

Stomach

The Hebrew word *hhai* [H:2416] is usually translated as life, but how did the Ancient Hebrews perceive “life”? A clue can be found in Job 38:39.

Will you hunt prey for the lion and will you fill the stomach (hhai) of the young lion?

Hhai is concretely the “stomach,” but in the abstract it means “life,” as in *In the six hundredth year of the life (hhai) of Noah... Genesis 7:11*

What does the stomach have to do with life? In our culture, it is very uncommon for anyone to experience true hunger, but this was an all-too-often experience for the Ancient Hebrews who lived a nomadic lifestyle, always in search of food and water. To them a full stomach was a sign of life.

Ref. The Living Words ~ Volume 1 Jeff Benner

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