

Bite Size Bible Study

Ancient Hebrew Thought #89

By Pastor Lee

As many of you have no doubt surmised, I like to study the Bible from an Ancient Hebrew perspective rather than from a Western one. An article sent to me by Jeff Brenner has given me a deeper understanding of how the ancient people thought, namely that they think in concrete terms rather than abstract thought as is so prevalent of us today.

He begins with the familiar Aaronic blessing in the English translation.

*The LORD **ble**ss you and **ke**ep you: The LORD make his **face** to **sh**ine upon you, and be **gr**acious to you: The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and **gr**ant you **pe**ace. (Numbers 6:24-26 RSV)*

Notice the bolded words are abstract words. Each of the Hebrew words behind the English in this passage is filled with images that are lost when translated into the English language.

Bless The Hebrew verb בָּרַךְ (Barakh, Strong's #1288) means to kneel as seen in Genesis 24:11. However, when written in the piel form {the Piel stem is the most flexible stem formation in Biblical Hebrew}, such as it is in Aaronic blessing, it means to show respect (usually translated as bless). However, as "respect" is an abstract word, we need to uncover its original concrete meaning, which we can do by examining other words related to this verb. One such related word is the noun בָּרַךְ (berekh, Strong's #1288) meaning "knee." Another related Hebrew word is בְּרָכָה (berakhah, Strong's #1293) meaning a gift or present. From this we can see the concrete meaning behind the piel form of the verb barak. It is to bring a gift to another while kneeling out of respect. The extended meaning of this word is to do or give something of value to another. Elohiym "respects" us by providing for our needs and we in turn "respect" Elohiym by giving him of ourselves as his servants.

Keep The Hebrews were a nomadic people raising livestock. In order to protect the flock at night, the shepherd would construct a corral of thorn bushes. The shepherd would then guard over the flock and the corral would be a hedge of protection around them. The Hebrew word for a thorn is שָׁמִיר (shamiyr, Strong's #8068) and derived from the verb שָׁמַר (shamar, Strong's #8104), which literally means to guard and protect.

Face The face reflects the many different moods, emotions, and thoughts of the person. The Hebrew word פָּנִים (paniym, Strong's #6440), means "face," but is always written in the plural form, reflecting this idea of

multiple faces of each person. This word can also mean "presence" or the "wholeness of being" of an individual.

Shine The word אוֹר (or, Strong's #215), as a noun means "light" and as a verb, as it is used here, means to "give light" or "shine" and is equated with bringing about order as light illuminates or reveals what has been dark.

Gracious Most theologians will define "grace" as "unmerited favor," but notice the abstractness of these words. The Hebrew verb translated as gracious in the Aaronic blessing is the verb הָנִיחַ (hhanan, Strong's #2603) and is often paralleled with other Hebrew words meaning healing, help, being lifted up, finding refuge, strength and rescue. From a concrete Hebraic perspective this verb means to "provide protection."

Grant The Hebrew verb שִׁים (siym, Strong's #7760), literally means to "set down in a fixed and arranged place."

Peace The Hebrew word שָׁלוֹם (shalom, Strong's #7965) has a very different meaning. The root of this word is שָׁלַם (shalam, Strong's #7999) and is usually used in the context of making restitution. When a person has caused another to become deficient in some way, such as a loss of livestock, it is the responsibility of the person who created the deficiency to restore what has been taken, lost or stolen. The verb shalam literally means to make whole or complete. The noun shalom has the more literal meaning of being in a state of wholeness, or being without deficiency.

A Hebraic interpretation of the Aaronic Blessing

YHWH will kneel before you {as a father to a little child} presenting gifts and will guard you with a hedge of protection.

YHWH will illuminate the wholeness of his being toward you bringing order and he will give you comfort and sustenance.

YHWH will lift up his wholeness of being and look upon you and he will set in place all you need to be whole and complete.

This has been an excerpt of an article by Jeff A. Benner "The Aaronic Blessing from a Hebrew Perspective". Complete article at: <https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/studies-interpretation/aaronic-blessing-from-a-hebrew-perspective.htm>

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