

6 Hebrew Words Every Believer Should Know

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“You sit over there in that holler, and I’ll try to run a deer over to ya.”

“The what?!?”

“The holler. Over yonder.”

Some of our readers are visualizing a place out in the woods, the low place where if one where standing you’d see bluffs all around you, probably a river valley of sorts where a creek either once ran or occasionally still runs during a particularly rainy season. It’s kind of difficult to explain a holler to someone who doesn’t speak the language that uses phrases like “the holler.” But I know exactly what a holler is and I know what it’d mean for someone to run a deer to me — and also that it’d probably not be the best to be positioned *in* a holler in order to shoot a deer. But I also don’t deer hunt — I just happened to grow up around many people who did.

Some of our readers are clueless as to what a holler is and haven’t come much further in their understanding by my words. Truth is, you’d probably need me to point my finger at the holler. You’d need to be immersed in that world because there are some things that just don’t translate well.

As I write this, I’m knee deep in the Hebrew language — taking an Advanced Hebrew course. That doesn’t mean I’m good at Hebrew. Far from it. I am still finding it difficult to master the language. It’s a beautiful language, but one that I’m having a difficult time

comprehending. But I am finding there is a richness to some of the words that I don't always pick up just reading in English. To borrow the words of Princess Jasmine, it's a whole new world. That world can be very confusing, and it can be rewarding.



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Why Should We Understand Any Hebrew, if We Read the Bible in English?

Thankfully, *you*, don't have to understand Hebrew or be a scholar in order to read your [Bible](#). But somebody *does* have to do this work. Someone has to sweat through the original languages and work with a team of others to bring the original into your native tongue.

What this means is that it isn't *necessary*, but you are receiving your information second-hand. That is certainly okay. And it's probably arrogant to think that if I give a little bit of time to learning the original languages, I'll be able to read them just as effectively as those who have given their lives to understanding the various nuances. There are ways in which we should rely upon second-hand information. Though he is talking to specifically to pastors, I think these words of John Piper are correct:

"Another result when pastors do not study the Bible in Greek and Hebrew is that they, and their churches with them, tend to become second-handers. The harder it is for us to get at the original meaning of the Bible, the more we will revert to the secondary literature. For one thing, it is easier to read. It also gives us a superficial glow that we are "keeping up" on things. And it provides us with ideas and insights which we can't dig out of the original for ourselves" (Piper, *Brothers We Are Not Professionals*, 83).

If Piper is correct, and I think he mostly is, then what this likely means is that many folks are getting third-hand information. Again, that isn't necessarily a bad thing. But it could be. Misinformation could easily be spread this way. It'd be helpful to at least learn enough to know what you don't know.

My goal today is to share with you six Hebrew words that might be helpful for you to know. But my goal is to merely whet your appetite and encourage you to consider studying the original languages for yourself. These are in no particular order.



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6 Hebrew Words Everyone Should Know

1. *Shalom*, שָׁלוֹם **shuh-LOM**

You've likely heard this word. *Shalom* is a rich word which means "[peace](#)" or "well-being." To have *shalom* means to be in peace and prosperity and to have completeness. *Shalom* is what we want to see restored after the fall of humanity. The noun occurs 237 times in the Hebrew OT. Most instances the word is translated as "peace."

To get a decent understanding of this word, consider [Genesis 37:4](#). The brothers of Joseph are envious of him and they hated him. Therefore "they could not speak *shalom* to him." This means they no longer wished the best for him. The word appears again when Joseph asks about the *shalom* of his brothers and his father ([Gen. 43:27-28](#)). In [Numbers 25:12](#) the concept is introduced that God is the bringer of *shalom* when he pronounces it over Phineas. And the priestly blessing in [Numbers 6:24-26](#) ends with "May YHWH lift up his countenance upon you and ordain *shalom* for you."

In [Isaiah 9:6](#) we see that the promised royal child will be called the Prince of *Shalom*. He is the one who will ultimately lead us back into *shalom*. The prophet Jeremiah speaks against those who pronounce a false *shalom*, thus solidifying that true *shalom* will only come through the work of the LORD.

This is an important word because it is a word that describes the ultimate destiny of believers in Jesus. We are given *shalom* through Him. This does not simply mean that we are given peace — but well-being, wholeness. It's a word that takes us back to Edenic paradise when all is well and as it is supposed to be.



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2. Torah תּוֹרָה tòr-ə.

This is another word that you've possibly heard. Most people know the word Torah as the first five books of the Old Testament. But the word itself means "law" or "direction, guidance, instruction." It occurs 220 times in the Hebrew OT, 36 times in the [Psalms](#).

Torah can refer specifically to the first five books of the Old Testament or it can refer to an overall body of instruction. "Instruction" is probably a better translation than even "law" because we tend to associate the word law with things like speed limit signs. But it is better to think of Torah as an entire body of knowledge that gives direction for the way to live. A book like [Proverbs](#) is a further exposition of Torah. Torah provides the bedrock for all belief.

[Psalm 119](#) is one of the better texts for understanding the comprehensive nature of Torah and how we should love God's instruction for our lives. This is an important word to know because it is so foundational to everything within the Old Testament. How does YHWH say we should live and relate to Him? To answer this question, one would consult Torah.

3. Hesed חֶסֶד kheh-sed

The word *hesed* appears 245 times in the OT and is pretty evenly distributed throughout the various books of the Old Testament. This is one of those words that really has no English or even Greek equivalent. This is why you'll often see this word blended with love and another adjectival word. For instance, in [Exodus 34:6](#) we see that YHWH is abounding in "steadfast love" (*hesed*). Simply translating it with love or kindness or mercy or favor does not do the word itself justice. It is a love that refuses not to love. One place to see it represented well is Hosea. It is *hesed* that has a husband speak tenderly to his adulterous wife in the wilderness.

[Micah 6:8](#) has *hesed* being one of the core things which he requires of humanity. Hesed is more than a feeling — it is action. It is compassion on display. [Isaiah 54:10](#) is another good place to show the commitment of hesed:

"For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my *hesed* shall not depart from you."

The mountains are the very foundation of the earth. They were considered the unshakeable things. So when God declares, through Isaiah, that even if the unshakeable would happen, his loving commitment to them would not be moved.



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4. Shabbat שבת shə-'bät

There is a verbal form of this word that, by my count, appears 71 times in the Old Testament. But the more formal “Sabbath” appears 111 times. The word itself means “to cease” or “to come to an end.” It means to rest. You’ve likely heard of the Sabbath. That is a transliteration of this Hebrew word. It is so important it is found in one of the [10 Commandments](#).

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

The Sabbath is all about rest. It is resting from our work as an act of trust in God. It was sown into the rhythms of the people of Israel. And it is part of what we were created for. This rest is connected to the promises which God has given all throughout the Scriptures.

5. Pesach פֶּסַח pā,säKH

This word is translated Passover. In [Exodus 12-13](#) we read of the death angel passing over the house of the Israelites and not slaying their firstborn. It was then to be a yearly memorial. Passover then takes upon massive significance throughout the Bible. It is connected to the Lord’s deliverance. The Lord Jesus would have celebrated this meal with his disciples.



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6. Mashiach מָשִׁיחַ maw-shee'-akh

This word only appears 39 times in the Old Testament, but one could say that the entire [Bible](#) is centered around this word. It means Messiah — anointed one. The word was often used of the kings in the Old Testament. It originally described the process of rubbing or smearing something, to anoint. But this practice was done to consecrate kings (or others) apart for a special purpose. Thus in [Psalm 2](#) we read of the kings of the earth rising up “against the LORD and against his *mashiach*.” This would be the one that the LORD chose and set apart to accomplish His mission. The kings of the earth rebel but God has “set his King on Zion” (v6).

Later the term Messiah took on a bigger role. The people longed for Messiah to come and save them and to rescue them. We ultimately see that Jesus is the prophet, priest, and king — the Anointed One who was foretold.

What Do All These Words Point To?

There are many other Hebrew terms that would be important to learn. I could have also written on the different terms for Hebrew sacrifice. But I chose these six words intentionally so I could show you at the end how they all relate to Jesus and the beautiful gospel.

Humanity was created for shalom. But we made shipwreck of this through our sin (another Hebrew concept I could have spoken on). We have all broken Torah. Rather than living as God has instructed, we have chosen to live life as we see fit. Because of our rebellion we are not able to enter into God’s shabbat. But because of his *hesed* he remains dedicated to redeeming a people for Himself. Just as he did through Pesach he rescues his people. He brings to us Mashiach to deliver us from our sins and to set us back to shalom. In Him we have true shabbat.

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