

The Names of the First Five Books of the Bible

The Torah, the first five books of the Bible, is the foundation of all that follows. And every word of the Bible is important. In Hebrew even the names of the books within the Bible are important. But they are different in our English Bible translations and as such we miss their significance. The translators, over the centuries, didn't just take the original Hebrew names of these books and translate them, they changed the names to reflect what they thought was the subject of the book. This changed the cultural and linguistic understanding of these important writings. In the Hebrew Bible, the names of these books are derived from a word or phrase within the first verse. In Hebrew names are an important part of the culture and language. In the Bible, the meaning of names is part of the substance of the narrative which contains them. So let's look at the Hebrew names of the first five books of the Bible and see what they mean.

Genesis

The book of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible is called "Bresheet", which means "in the beginning." "In the beginning" would be a strange title in English language and culture, as well as many other western cultures, but makes perfect sense in Hebrew.

#7225 in the Strong's Dictionary. ראשית re'shiyth, ray-sheeth' from the same as #7218; the first, in place, time, order or rank (specifically, a firstfruit):--**beginning**, chief(-est), first(-fruits, part, time), principal thing.

By adding the letter beit (ב) to the beginning of the word, it adds the meaning "in" or "into," hence it is translated as "in the beginning."

Exodus

Exodus, is just that, the story of the Exodus. But the Hebrew name is Shemot, שמות which means "These are the Names."

#8034. שם shem, a primitive word (perhaps rather from #7760 through the idea of definite and conspicuous position; compare #8064); an appellation, as a mark or memorial of individuality; by implication honor, authority, character:--+ base, (in-)fame(-ous), **name**, renown, report.

By adding the letter tav to the end of the word, it becomes a plural form, names.

Leviticus

Leviticus in Hebrew Bible the book of Viyikra which means "called out."

#7121. קרא qara', kaw-raw'. A primitive root. **To call out to** (i.e. properly, address by name, but used in a wide variety of applications):--bewray (self), that are bidden, call (for, forth, self, upon), cry (unto), (be) famous, guest, invite, mention, (give) name, preach, (make) proclaim(-ation), pronounce, publish, read, renowned, say.

By adding a Vav and a yood to the beginning of קרא, we get ויקרא vayikra which means "he called" or in the context of the verse, "the LORD called out."

Numbers

When we think of the book of numbers, that is exactly what we think of, long lists of numbers. The book starts out with a census and contains an accounting of the generations of the children of Israel. Name after name, list after list, story after story, the book of Numbers reads like an accountant's ledger. But it is really about their time in the wilderness which is the Hebrew name for this book, Bamidbar.

#4057. מדבר midbar, mid-baw'r from #1696 in the sense of driving; a pasture (i.e. open field, whither cattle are driven); by implication, a desert; also speech (including its organs):--desert, south, speech, **wilderness**.

Again, as with Bresheet, by adding the letter beit ב to the beginning of the word, we get “in the wilderness.”

Deuteronomy

The last book of the Torah is Deuteronomy. The name Deuteronomy is of Greek origin and literally means “second words”, referring to this book being a restatement of the “nomos”, or the law. In Hebrew this book is called דְּבָרִים Devarim. It comes from the word dabar.

#1697. דָּבָר dabar, daw-bawr' from #1696; a word; by implication, a (spoken) matter or thing; manner, matter, message, oracle, saying, sentence, song, speech, talk, task, tidings, **word**, work.

Adding the yood and a mem ים to the end of דָּבָר we get a plural form, Devarim. In this word the letter beit ב is pronounced with a “v” sound. Devarim opens with “These are the words that Moses spoke...” The words are those of God, His words, His law, His Torah! So what is the combined meaning of the Hebrew names of these books, the Torah of God?

In the beginning / these are the names / the LORD called out / in the wilderness / and these are His words.

The first five books of the Bible are collectively known as the Torah in Hebrew. The word Torah is most often translated in English as “law” which is derived primarily from the Greek “nomos.” Torah, in turn, comes from the Hebrew word יָרָה yarah.

#3384. יָרָה yarah, yaw-raw' a primitive root; to point out (as if by aiming the finger or in archery, aiming an arrow), to teach, direct, inform, instruct (ion), lay, teaching.

But, as we see here, Torah is far more than mere law as we would understand it in English. Torah is literally an “instruction” or “teaching.” The Torah was given to the Children of Israel and the mixed multitude with them, after their redemption from Egypt, after their release from their bondage and slavery. The Torah is instruction from God so that we, as a descendent of Israel (Jacob) or as part of the mixed multitude (the Nations or Gentiles), can fellowship and draw near to God, our redeemer!

The Torah is many faceted. It is the story of our redemption, it is our instruction in living a sanctified life, it is our “constitution” governing our relationships to one another and it contains the entire redemption plan for man and is the story of the Messiah. The word Torah itself is a sign of things to come.

Many Hebrew words, when taking into account the meaning of the individual letters, give us a kind of word picture. Here is a word picture of the word Torah: Hebrew is read right to left.

Torah: תּוֹרָה

Tav: ת Cross, covenant or sign of the covenant

Vav: ו Nail, tent peg, to secure

Resh: ר Person especially the highest person, head

Hey: ה To reveal.

Torah: The covenant secured by the highest person revealed or, if read backwards, revealing the highest person nailed to the cross.

Shalom and be blessed

Dan & Brenda Cathcart

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