

What People Are Saying About Chaim Bentorah and *Hebrew Word Study*...

You are going to love reading *Hebrew Word Study: Revealing the Heart of God*! For decades, I've had the privilege of learning from the wit and wisdom of Chaim Bentorah. His insights into the Hebrew language deliver interesting and life-changing perspectives that I've seen only from his work.

—Lester Sumrall
President, HEIR.TV

Chaim Bentorah has studied Semitic languages for many years, and his approach to, and use of, the esoteric Hebrew in his Bible studies is inspiring and enlightening. His stunning research and manner of presentation have greatly deepened my own personal devotional study. He puts great emphasis in his word studies on understanding the heart of God without promoting specific doctrines. His writings are original and practical, with application for everyday life, and there are many insightful lessons for all audiences. His mastery of the Hebrew and Aramaic languages is cutting-edge and relevant, providing messages of hope, strength, and peace for the perplexing times in which we live.

—Mark Siljander
Former US Congressman & UN Ambassador
President, Bridges to Common Ground
Author, *A Deadly Misunderstanding*

Chaim Bentorah's rich insights into the Scriptures are incredibly life-changing. He writes in a way that makes the Bible come alive!

—Kari Browning
Director, New Renaissance Healing & Creativity Center,
Coeur d'Alene, ID
Author, *Unsealing Ancient Mysteries*

I have had the privilege of being on the receiving end of the amazing fruit that Chaim Bentorah is producing in regard to understanding the passionate heart of the Lord by gaining a basic understanding of the Hebrew alphabet and words. And I've seen firsthand hearts being opened to know Jesus better through Chaim's work. Apart from just being a great guy, Chaim Bentorah is a true friend of the Bridegroom. I highly recommend his books as a tool to attain greater intimacy with the Lord.

—*Marvin Adams*

Executive Director, IHOPE (Indiana House of Prayer & Equipping)

In *Hebrew Word Study: Revealing the Heart of God*, Chaim Bentorah's writings are deep, insightful, and totally addictive. I found myself probing the depths of the ancient Hebrew scripts and etymologies with an unexpected twenty-first-century twist. There's nothing comparable to Chaim's unique approach to unraveling the mysteries in the Scriptures with his unabashed human touch. Put on a pot of coffee, sit back in your favorite easy chair, take a deep breath, and plunge into another mighty adventure!

—*Peter Scott Snyder, BA, MA, PhD*
Missionary to China

HEBREW WORD STUDY

REVEALING THE HEART OF GOD

CHAIM
BENTORAH



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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The forms *LORD* and *GOD* (in small caps) in Bible quotations represent the Hebrew name for God *Yahweh* (*Jehovah*), while *Lord* and *God* normally represent the Hebrew name for God *Adonai*, in accordance with the Bible version used.

HEBREW WORD STUDY:

Revealing the Heart of God

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Dedication

*To Michelle Foss and Laura Bertone,
who came to me when I needed a friend.*

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Author's Note

Please refer to the alphabetical Glossary at the end of this book for definitions and explanations of historical, cultural, and linguistic terms followed by an asterisk * when they initially occur in the text. Some of these terms may first appear in plural form. For clarity, in the case of a term consisting of two words, two asterisks ** will follow the second word of the term, and in the case of a term consisting of three words, three asterisks *** will follow the third word of the term.

As with other Semitic languages, the original Hebrew alphabet is consonantal, with no separate letters for vowels. Nevertheless, vowel sounds were used in the Hebrew language, because it is impossible to pronounce a word without using the sounds represented by *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*. In rabbinic Hebrew, the letters aleph, hei, yod, and vav can be used to denote a vowel. Additionally, around the seventh century AD, the Masoretic text introduced the *niqqud*, which are a series of dots and dashes placed near a consonantal letter to indicate a vowel. The normal pattern is: consonant, vowel, consonant, vowel. I use the *abajab*, or the consonantal alphabet, and follow a rabbinical tradition of defaulting to using the *a* whenever any vowel is needed, except in cases where I am explaining a certain word usage or grammatical expression. Additionally, while many academic texts use left-handed apostrophes for the aleph and right-handed apostrophes for the ayin,

this text has been streamlined, using right-handed apostrophes for both.

Finally, in the Scripture quotations, braces indicate my own translation, brackets indicate words added or substituted for clarity and/or flow, and boldface type indicates my emphasis.

Foreword

Have you ever wished you could know God better? I would love to walk in the garden and converse with God as Adam did; alas, the reality is that our most authoritative source for understanding Him is what is written in Scriptures that came from the heart of God into a human language that we can't understand, and were then translated into yet another language that we can understand. This book is designed to bring us beyond just reading various translations of the Bible to discovering the very heart of God.

The old adage “Something was lost in translation” holds more truth than we often care to admit. Each language of the world has its own unique semantic domain, or meanings understood by each word used. For example, I can say the word *house*, and it will raise a variety of images in your mind. If I were to use the equivalent word, *rالا*, among the remote Amanab people in the tropical rainforest of Papua, New Guinea, they would have a completely different set of images—none of which would match the image that is in your mind. In other words, the most accurate translation of even one simple word can convey many different meanings.

At the core of any translation effort is the desire to convey into the receptor language—as much as is possible—everything intended by the speaker. When it comes to Bible translation, reverence for the inspiration of Scripture causes us to conclude that a technically

accurate translation is preferred. Modern, paraphrased versions of Scripture are considered to be more for devotional use.

In this book, you will find a wonderful blend of the same respect that ancient rabbis had for the holy Word of God, combined with the skill of a contemporary Hebrew teacher who reveals through the language itself—by closely looking at the words we have received from God—a devotional understanding of what was in His mind. What we discover is the heart of God; and, in the process, we get to know Him better.

—*Andrew Minch*
Papua, New Guinea, Translation Consultant
Wycliffe Bible Translators

Preface

Many years ago, as a graduate student, I studied under a highly respected Hebrew professor. I learned that he would get up early every morning and study the Word of God for three hours in the original Hebrew,* Aramaic,* and Greek.* I aspired to be like my professor, and indeed it has been my habit for these many years to arise early and study the Word of God in the original languages for a minimum of three hours a day. This is just a minimum. There have been periods when I would study the Word of God eight to ten hours a day.

You may wonder how a person can study the Word of God so much. Some people can barely read through the Bible in one year, and they consider that an accomplishment. However, these same people can take a popular novel that is longer than the Bible itself and polish that off in a week's time.

One secret to sustained studying of God's Word is this: if you fall in love with the Author of the Bible, you will feel there is not enough time in the day to study His Word. Also, as your love for Him deepens, He will reveal His secrets to you. I have found the Word of God to be a well that never runs dry.

Of course, having been a teacher of Classical Hebrew** and Aramaic does help. I have learned the freedom that we have through allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us. I have learned that our Bible

lexicons* and dictionaries are not the final word. I have also learned that with over one hundred twenty different modern English translations of the Bible, all putting their own spin on various passages of Scripture, I can allow the Holy Spirit to guide me in any number of these different spins.

The reason for this freedom is that Classical Hebrew is an ambiguous language. It has only seventy-five hundred words, as opposed to Modern Hebrew, which has a quarter million words. Accordingly, every word of Classical Hebrew can have multiple meanings. Just looking up a word in a Hebrew dictionary, in a lexicon, or in *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* will not really tell you how a word is to be used in a particular verse. Much of the translation process involves a close examination of the context, the culture of the day, and the idioms* in order to determine which of the many possible English words to apply to any given Hebrew word in a specific verse. I learned from Jewish rabbis that you must also put a Hebrew word into its emotional context. Hebrew is an emotional language—a language of poets—and thus there is an emotional context involved in many passages of Scripture.

I was even taught through rabbinic literature** how to translate letter by letter. You will find some of that approach in this book. I do not advocate using the traditional meanings behind Hebrew letters to assist in a word study on an academic level; however, for one's own personal devotional study, using the meanings behind Hebrew letters to better understand a Hebrew word and to put it into its context is a tool that could prove to be of value, if for no other reason than to cause one to meditate on the Word of God. Therefore, when I apply the traditional meanings behind Hebrew letters, my conclusions are not to be considered authoritative but rather the ponderings and musings of an old teacher seeking to understand the heart of the God whom he has learned to love over his many years.

Accordingly, this book is not an examination of the common usages and applications of various Hebrew words. Those books are plentiful enough. Instead, it seeks to walk the road less traveled, to examine the secondary and optional meanings of certain Hebrew

words, to seek the origin of a word and to plug it into the context and see if it fits. If it does fit, then maybe there is a deeper spiritual message to be found.

In no way does this book seek to undermine any of our modern translations. It is this writer's belief that all of our modern English versions of the Bible were translated by men and women skilled in the biblical languages and in linguistics. Every word in the more than one hundred twenty modern English translations was prayerfully considered, and it is my position that even though different translations may contain different meanings, expressions, and nuances, they all reflect the inspired Word of God. They also demonstrate the ambiguity of the Classical Hebrew language and the infinite greatness of God.

Let me illustrate: If you look at a drop of water with the naked eye, you see just one drop of water. But if you put that drop of water under a microscope, you see a whole world of life within it, things that you could never see without the magnification. So it is with the Word of God. You may see just one word, but put that word under a spiritual microscope, and you will see a whole world of life within it that you hadn't even begun to imagine. The Jewish Talmud* teaches that there are "seventy faces" to Torah.* That is, every verse could have seventy different shades of meaning. The Word of God is pictured as a gemstone that is taken out to the sunlight. When the light reflects off the gemstone, it displays many different colors.

To be sure, there is a literal meaning to every verse, and the Talmud does warn that we are never to wander away from the *pashat*, or the literal meaning. Yet the literal interpretation is like the surface of the ocean. It is beautiful and vast, but if you dive beneath that surface—similar to observing that drop of water under a microscope—you will find a brand-new world filled with amazing wonders. This, again, is how it is with the Word of God. Its surface meaning is vast and beautiful. Many books have been written declaring the beauty of the surface meaning. This book, however, seeks to dive beneath that surface, to explore options, alternatives, and secondary meanings that are often not applied to a passage of Scripture and to challenge

the reader to see if he or she can discover a depth of truth, a message from God, that he or she has not yet explored.

I am aware that many insights in this book are not found in your average Christian library, but you will find them in the depths of Jewish literature, such as the Talmud, the Mishnah,* the Midrash,* and other works of Jewish scholars over the past three thousand years. The Jews, of course, are the people of the Old Testament and the guardians of the Hebrew language. For centuries, Christians have shunned the works of Judaism because the Jewish people as a whole did not accept Jesus as their Messiah. Christians have felt that if the Jews would not accept Jesus as Messiah, then what could they have to offer to Christians? But just because they have not accepted Jesus as their Messiah does not mean that their mission as God's chosen people has been withdrawn.

With the founding of the country of Israel in 1948, and with Christians' growing understanding of the role that the Jewish people play in God's prophetic plan, Christians have been warming up to the Jewish community and recognizing the vast storehouse of knowledge of God and of His Word that they have built up over the last several thousand years. Only in recent generations have Christians come to understand that being the chosen people means more than having been selected by God as the people through whom the Messiah would come into the world; it also means that their role is to demonstrate to the world the holiness of God, the loving nature of God, and how to love Him in return. Christians are discovering that their roots lie in Judaism, that their Savior Jesus Christ was Jewish, and that the first Christians were Jewish. Suddenly, Christians are approaching the Jewish community hat in hand and "[taking] *hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, 'We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you'*" (Zechariah 8:23).

I make no apology for my references in this book to the Talmud, the Mishnah, and other Jewish works. I have studied them for forty years and have even studied them in the Aramaic. I have found great wisdom in them and an understanding of God that I generally find

lacking in the Christian community. Most important, I have learned that God has a heart—a heart that is easily broken.

I was born and raised in orthodox, evangelical Christianity. I am a Christian, and I cling to the tenets of my faith that were instilled in me as a small child. I have read and reread the ninety studies in this book, and I personally do not believe that any of them would in any way step outside the boundaries of my evangelical faith. If you feel there are passages where I have done so, I want to hear from you. I can be reached through the contact information at the back of this book. I want to know where I may have strayed from the paths of the fundamentals of our faith. I sincerely doubt, however, that you will find any conflict with our orthodox Christian beliefs. If you do, then I was misunderstood, and I will stand to be corrected.

This book, compiled from daily word study devotionals that I have written over the years, will introduce you to a world you have probably not visited before. Again, the Hebrew language is a language of poetry and pictures. One can read many depths of meaning into a well-written poem. The Jewish poet Hayim Nahman Bialik once said that to study the Holy Scriptures in any language other than the original Hebrew is like kissing your bride with a veil between your face and hers. I hope this book will remove that veil so that you will see just how beautiful the Word of God really is and that you, too, will seek to truly know and understand our God so that you will not inadvertently wound His heart.

You begin your journey to the heart of God by looking
for the obvious.

Never take anything of God's creation for granted:
from the highest mountain or the mightiest storm to the smallest
ant or even a blade of grass.

All cry out to us from the very heart of God.

—*Chaim Bentorah*

Study 1

Refuge: *Sagav* (שגב)

*“The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed,
a refuge in times of trouble.”*

—Psalm 9:9

Jacques Lowe was the personal photographer for President John F. Kennedy. He had over forty thousand negatives of photographs of Kennedy and his immediate family in his collection, but only four hundred photos were ever published. Jacques Lowe was a very careful and meticulous person, and he took exceptional care of his negatives and photographs. If a museum or a library needed one of his photos, he personally developed it himself. When it came time to find a safe place to store his negatives, he researched every possible option available and eventually decided that the safest place for them in the whole world would be a vault at the J. P. Morgan Chase Bank in New York City. Today, none of those forty thousand negatives exist. You see, this vault was located in the World Trade Center and was destroyed in the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001.

A Place of Ultimate Safety

David, the author of our study verse, lived a life on the edge as a warrior and a king. He was probably more aware than anyone else

that, even for a king, there was no truly safe place on earth. Yet when David said that the Lord is “*a refuge for the oppressed*” and “*a refuge in times of trouble*,” he was referring to a place of ultimate safety. The Hebrew term translated “*refuge*,” *sagav* (שָׁגַב), which means “to be high,” is a very unusual word to be used in the sense of a refuge. The picture is of a refuge in the heavens or in outer space—a place that is inaccessible.

The term “*oppressed*” is from the Hebrew word *’adah* (עָדָה), which means “to be crushed under by affliction” or “to have a heavy weight on top of something.” The word for “*trouble*” is *tsarar* (צָרַר), which means “to be bound up”; it could also come from the root word *bat-sar* (בָּצַר), meaning “a pruning.” God is a refuge for us from those who seek to crush us or to hold us down, or from those who have us bound up in fear. The meaning of *sagav* (שָׁגַב), or “*refuge*,” does not only give a picture of God surrounding us and protecting us, but also of Him lifting us up and carrying us away from all the problems and stresses that have us bound.

Taken to a Height Above the Storm

I remember a time when I was on a plane, and the aircraft passed through a storm, so that we were buffeted about by strong turbulence. The pilot announced he would take the plane up a couple hundred feet. After that, we were flying above the storm. We had entered a place where it was calm and peaceful. When I looked out my window, I could still see the storm raging and the lightning flashing below us. This is what *sagav* (שָׁגַב) refers to; this is the shelter that David is speaking about. It is not a situation where we are going *through* a storm or being protected *in* it; rather, God is taking us to a new height where the storm cannot reach us.

As a shepherd—and probably afterward, even as king—David spent a lot of time looking up into the sky, especially viewing the stars and the planets in the evening hours. To him, those heights were the safest place that anyone could be. No one could touch you if you rose to such an altitude. Like David, we will sometimes face problems that have the potential of crushing us, thus provoking great fear that

binds us up. At those times, perhaps we can sit back, as David did, and picture God taking us to a new height.

The promise in Psalm 9:9 is that when the storms of life threaten us, the Lord is our refuge; He makes us inaccessible to the storms. We may think we can find shelter in some natural haven, or in the “arm of flesh.” But just as Jacques Lowe was mistaken when he thought he had found the safest place in the world for his photographs and negatives, we will soon realize that it is a mistake for us to trust in human strength. Even the vaults of the Chase Bank could not offer protection from life’s turbulence and perils. The only real protection or shelter for us, as David knew, is in the arms of God, which simply lift us up and away from the storms of life, where we can rest in Him; from there, we can look down in peace from the height of His care even as the storms rage below us.