



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

## BIBLE FOUNDATIONS

# Words That Lose Some Meaning in English Translation

How Hebrew Words Can Carry More Than One English Word Can Express

### The Short Answer

The Bible can be faithfully translated into English, but translation always requires choices. Hebrew and English do not divide meaning in exactly the same ways. A Hebrew word may carry several related senses that require different English words in different passages.

For example, *nephesh* may be translated “soul,” “life,” “person,” or “self”; *ruach* may mean “spirit,” “wind,” or “breath”; *lev* may describe the heart, thoughts, intentions, desires, or inner person; *shama* may mean “hear,” “listen,” or - when context supports it - heed what has been heard; and *hesed* may be rendered “steadfast love,” “lovingkindness,” “mercy,” “kindness,” or “faithful love.”

Understanding these ranges can deepen Bible reading without creating secret meanings hidden from ordinary readers. The goal of Hebrew word study is not to replace English translations. It is to read them more carefully.

Deuteronomy 6:4-6 · Psalm 103:1-14 · Psalm 139:1-7 · Proverbs 4:23 · Ezekiel 36:26-27

### Opening Memory Anchor

Translation is not the loss of Scripture. It is the careful communication of Scripture from one language into another.



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

## PART ONE BEGINNER GUIDE

### How to Use This Study

Read Part One for the essential principles. Continue into Part Two for deeper study of translation, manuscripts, and word-study methodology. Several words appeared in earlier 3Nails Hebrew studies; the repetition is intentional. This study is a capstone on how to handle Hebrew words and English translations responsibly.

### 1. DO HEBREW WORDS REALLY “LOSE MEANING” IN ENGLISH?

Sometimes - but the phrase needs qualification. A translation can communicate a passage accurately even when one English word cannot reproduce every possible meaning of the original Hebrew word. English “bank” can mean a financial institution, a riverbank, tilting an airplane, or storing something. No reader expects all meanings at once. Hebrew works similarly.

**Hebrew word ≠ one fixed English word.** And **Hebrew word ≠ all possible meanings at once.** The sentence, paragraph, book, and historical setting help determine the intended sense.

### Memory Anchor

**A word has a range of possible meanings. Context determines which meaning is active.**

### 2. WHAT IS “SEMANTIC RANGE”?

Semantic range means the range of meanings a word can have. *Ruach*, for example, can refer to wind, breath, spirit, the human spirit, or God's Spirit. Genesis 8:1 speaks of wind; Ezekiel 36:27 speaks of God's Spirit; Ezekiel 37 deliberately moves across breath, wind, life, and Spirit imagery. The question is not “What does this word always mean?” but “What does it mean here?”

### 3. נֶפֶשׁ - NEPESH

**Strong's:** H5315 **Common translations:** Soul; life; person; self; living being **Read:** Genesis 2:7; Leviticus 17:11; Psalm 42:1-2; 103:1

*Nepesh* is frequently translated “soul,” but its range is broader than the modern idea of an invisible spiritual component inside a physical body. In Genesis 2:7, the man becomes a living *nepesh*. Elsewhere it can refer to a living being, a person, someone's life, the self, desire, appetite, or what English calls the soul. This does not settle every doctrine of body and soul; it shows that the word itself should not automatically be defined as “the immortal spiritual part of a human being.”

### 4. רוּחַ - RUACH

**Strong's:** H7307 **Common translations:** Spirit; wind; breath **Read:** Genesis 1:2; 8:1; Ezekiel 36:26-27; 37:1-14

*Ruach* is a clear example of why one-to-one translation is impossible. Depending on context, it can mean wind, breath, spirit, the human spirit, or the Spirit of God. Ezekiel 37 moves among several of these ideas. English translators must make choices because English normally uses separate words where Hebrew can use one.

### 5. לֵב / לֵבָב - LEV / LEVAV

**Strong's:** H3820 / H3824 **Common translation:** Heart **Read:** Deuteronomy 6:5; 1 Samuel 16:7; Proverbs 4:23; Jeremiah 17:9

Biblical “heart” language can include thoughts, understanding, intentions, decisions, desires, emotions, and moral character. It often describes more of the inner person than modern English emotional language suggests. Loving God with the whole heart therefore involves more than feelings.



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

## 6. שָׁמַע - SHAMA

**Strong's:** H8085 **Common translations:** Hear; listen; heed; obey **Read:** Genesis 3:17; Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Samuel 15:22

Because listening to God often requires responding to Him, *shama* can carry the sense of attentive hearing or heeding. But "shama literally means hear and obey" goes too far. The verb can simply describe hearing a sound or receiving information. In other contexts, hearing clearly implies response. The theological truth that genuine listening should lead to obedience should not become an inaccurate universal dictionary definition.

## 7. יָדָע - YADA

**Strong's:** H3045 **Common translations:** Know; recognize; understand **Read:** Genesis 4:1; Exodus 6:7; Psalm 139:1-4; Hosea 6:6

*Yada* can describe facts, recognition, skill, experience, observation, or personal knowledge. Genesis 4:1 uses it in sexual intimacy, but that does not mean it always means "intimate relational knowledge." Psalm 139 is powerful because the whole passage describes God's personal knowledge, not because *yada* contains a secret definition.

## 8. יִרָאָה - YIRAH

**Strong's:** H3374 **Common translations:** Fear; reverence; awe **Read:** Deuteronomy 10:12; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; Psalm 111:10

The fear of the LORD recognizes God's holiness, authority, greatness, judgment, goodness, and the seriousness of responding rightly to Him. It should not be reduced either to terror only or to polite respect only.

## 9. חֶסֶד - HESED

**Strong's:** H2617 **Common translations:** Steadfast love; lovingkindness; mercy; kindness; faithful love **Read:** Exodus 34:6-7; Psalm 23:6; Psalm 136; Micah 6:8

*Hesed* can involve kindness, loyalty, mercy, faithful love, or steadfast devotion, especially in relational settings and descriptions of God's faithful character. "Covenant love" and "unconditional love" may capture aspects in some contexts, but neither is an adequate universal lexical definition.

## 10. שָׁלוֹם - SHALOM

**Strong's:** H7965 **Common translations:** Peace; welfare; well-being; completeness **Read:** Numbers 6:24-26; Genesis 43:27; Jeremiah 29:7; Isaiah 32:17

*Shalom* can refer to peace, welfare, safety, well-being, completeness, or things being well. "Nothing missing, nothing broken" can illustrate aspects of wholeness but is not its literal dictionary definition. Biblical peace is richer than merely the absence of conflict.

## 11. צְדָקָה / צֶדֶק - TSEDEQ / TSEDAQAH

**Strong's:** H6664 / H6666 **Common translations:** Righteousness; justice; rightness **Read:** Genesis 15:6; 18:19; Psalm 89:14; Isaiah 1:27

Biblical Hebrew does not always separate "righteousness" and "justice" as sharply as modern English can. Context may emphasize personal conduct, honest dealings, justice, right standing, vindication, or behavior consistent with God's standards. Later Jewish usage strongly associates *tzedakah* with charitable giving, but biblical *tsedaqah* should not simply be defined as "charity."

## 12. מִשְׁפָּט - MISHPAT

**Strong's:** H4941 **Common translations:** Judgment; justice; ordinance; legal decision **Read:** Deuteronomy 16:18-20; Isaiah 1:17; Micah 6:8; Amos 5:24

*Mishpat* may describe judgment, a judicial decision, justice, an ordinance, or what is legally or properly due. The prophets repeatedly condemn distorted justice, especially when the powerful exploit the vulnerable while maintaining religious activity.



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

### 13. קָדוֹשׁ - QADOSH

**Strong's:** H6918 **Common translations:** Holy; sacred **Read:** Exodus 19:6; Leviticus 19:2; Isaiah 6:1-5

"Holy literally means set apart" is too thin. Set-apartness is connected to holiness, but God's holiness includes His incomparable majesty, purity, glory, and divine uniqueness. No one sets God apart and makes Him holy. He is holy in Himself.

### 14. קָבוֹד - KAVOD

**Strong's:** H3519 **Common translations:** Glory; honor **Read:** Exodus 24:16-17; 33:18-23; Psalm 19:1; Isaiah 6:3

The word family associated with *kavod* can carry ideas of heaviness or weight, but in many contexts *kavod* means glory, honor, dignity, or splendor. A word's history or related forms do not override actual usage. "God's glory has weight" may work as a metaphor; "kavod always literally means physical weight" does not.

#### Memory Anchor

A word's root may explain part of its history. The sentence tells what the word means there.

### 15. A QUICK TRANSLATION COMPARISON

| Hebrew word       | Common English | What English may not show by itself            |
|-------------------|----------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Nephesh           | Soul           | Life, self, person, living being               |
| Ruach             | Spirit         | Wind or breath                                 |
| Lev / Levav       | Heart          | Thought, intention, understanding, will        |
| Shama             | Hear           | Attentive listening or heeding in context      |
| Yada              | Know           | Ordinary knowledge through personal experience |
| Yirah             | Fear           | Reverence and awe                              |
| Hesed             | Love / mercy   | Kindness, loyalty, steadfast devotion          |
| Shalom            | Peace          | Welfare, safety, well-being, completeness      |
| Tsedeq / Tsedaqah | Righteousness  | Justice and rightness                          |
| Mishpat           | Judgment       | Justice or legal decision                      |
| Qadosh            | Holy           | "Set apart" alone is too narrow                |
| Kavod             | Glory          | Related to heaviness, but commonly honor/glory |

### THREE WORKED EXAMPLES

**NEPHESH - Genesis 2:7:** The phrase *nephesh chayyah* has been rendered "living soul" or "living being." The context describes the human becoming a living *nephesh*. Modern "living being" often avoids importing a later narrow idea into "soul." **Lesson:** compare the English word with the context before building theology from it.

**SHAMA - Deuteronomy 6:4:** *Shema Yisrael* is commonly "Hear, O Israel." The covenant context calls Israel to receive God's words, love Him, remember, teach, and live accordingly. **Lesson:** obedience belongs to the passage's theology without requiring the dictionary definition "hear + obey."

**RUACH - Ezekiel 37:** The vision moves among breath, wind, life, and God's Spirit. English cannot use one natural word in every occurrence without obscuring something. **Lesson:** translation differences can reveal richness in the original rather than translator inconsistency.



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

## PART TWO

# WANT TO GO DEEPER? - INTERMEDIATE

### Optional Deeper Study

Part One can stand alone as the core study. Continue here for translation philosophy, textual criticism, and word-study methodology.

### 16. IS A "LITERAL" TRANSLATION ALWAYS MORE ACCURATE?

No. Translation must communicate meaning, not merely replace one word with another. If English says "It's raining cats and dogs," a literal word-for-word rendering may communicate nonsense in another language. Biblical translation faces similar issues with idioms, grammar, word order, figures of speech, cultural expressions, and words with multiple meanings. "More word-for-word" and "more accurate" are not always identical categories.

### 17. A SIMPLE TRANSLATION SPECTRUM

**Formal / more word-for-word:** NASB and ESV generally lean toward preserving wording and structure where workable. **Mediating:** NIV often balances original-language structure with natural contemporary English. **Functional / more meaning-based:** NLT generally leans toward expressing the meaning naturally. These are tendencies, not rigid boxes. Every translation sometimes must be more literal and sometimes more interpretive. Comparing trustworthy translations from different points on the spectrum can be especially useful.

### 18. HOW DO TRANSLATORS ACTUALLY MAKE THESE DECISIONS?

Professional Bible translation is usually collaborative. Committees consider manuscript evidence, Hebrew or Greek grammar, semantic range, context, idioms, literary style, clarity, readability, intended audience, and consistency across Scripture. They ask whether a literal rendering communicates naturally, whether readers might misunderstand the English word, whether context requires a more specific expression, and whether a footnote should preserve another reasonable possibility.

### 19. WHY DO GOOD BIBLE TRANSLATIONS SOMETIMES DISAGREE?

Sometimes a word has more than one possible sense. Sometimes grammar permits more than one interpretation. Sometimes an idiom has no direct English equivalent. Sometimes translators disagree about how explicit English should be. And sometimes the surviving ancient manuscripts do not all preserve exactly the same wording.

#### Three Different Questions

**SEMANTICS:** What can this word mean?

**TRANSLATION:** How should that meaning be expressed in English?

**TEXTUAL CRITICISM:** Which ancient wording is best supported by the manuscript evidence?

### 20. WHEN TRANSLATIONS DIFFER BECAUSE THE MANUSCRIPTS DIFFER

The careful comparison of surviving manuscripts is called **textual criticism**. It does not mean "criticizing the Bible." Ancient books were copied by hand, and small differences entered some copies. Most variants involve spelling, word order, repetition, omission, or small wording differences and do not create major theological differences.

**Mark 16:9-20:** the longer ending is absent from some important early manuscripts, so many modern translations bracket it or include a note. **John 7:53-8:11:** the woman caught in adultery is absent from some early manuscripts and appears in different locations in some others, so modern translations commonly mark it. **1 John 5:7-8:** later manuscripts contain expanded wording commonly called the Comma Johanneum; it appears in the KJV tradition but is absent from the earliest Greek evidence and therefore from most modern translations.

### Memory Anchor

Some Bible differences come from word meaning. Others come from manuscript evidence.



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

## 21. DOES TEXTUAL CRITICISM MEAN THE BIBLE CANNOT BE TRUSTED?

No. Because many manuscripts survive, scholars can compare them. Differences can be identified rather than hidden, and visible disputed passages are usually marked openly in modern translations. No central Christian doctrine rests only on a passage whose wording is textually uncertain. The resurrection, Trinity, salvation by grace, Jesus' deity, crucifixion, and return do not depend solely on Mark 16:9-20, John 7:53-8:11, or the expanded wording of 1 John 5:7-8.

### Reader Safeguard

Honest footnotes are not signs that translators are hiding uncertainty. They are signs that translators are showing readers the evidence.

## 22. WHY "BROTHERS" VS. "BROTHERS AND SISTERS"?

The Greek *adelphoi* is grammatically the plural of "brother," but in some contexts it can address a mixed group of men and women. One translation may preserve the grammatical form "brothers"; another may make the intended mixed audience explicit as "brothers and sisters." A translation may add an English word to communicate something already implied by the original expression. That differs from adding a new idea.

## 23. DO THE SAME PRINCIPLES APPLY TO GREEK?

Yes. New Testament Greek words also have semantic ranges, grammatical forms, idioms, contextual meanings, and translation challenges. Learning Greek does not reveal a secret New Testament any more than learning Hebrew reveals a secret Old Testament. The same safeguards apply: context, grammar, actual usage, comparison of passages, and careful lexical study.

## 24. DOES SHAMA REALLY MEAN "HEAR AND OBEY"?

Not as a universal definition. "Biblical hearing often demands response" is a sound theological observation. "Shama always literally means hear and obey" is not a sound lexical definition. A theological implication of a passage is not necessarily part of the dictionary definition of every word in that passage.

## 25. DOES YADA ALWAYS MEAN INTIMATE RELATIONAL KNOWLEDGE?

No. Genesis 4:1 uses *yada* in intimacy, but many passages use it for ordinary knowledge. The personal knowledge of Psalm 139 comes from the entire passage, not a hidden lexical meaning.

## 26. DOES NEPHEESH DISPROVE THE EXISTENCE OF A SOUL?

No. Correcting an overly narrow definition can create an opposite error. The Bible's teaching about human nature, death, resurrection, and the intermediate state must be studied across Scripture. A word study can clarify vocabulary; it cannot replace whole-Bible theology.

## 27. DOES KAVOD "LITERALLY MEAN WEIGHT"?

Too simplistic. The word family has associations with heaviness, but *kavod* commonly means glory, honor, dignity, or splendor. English also develops extended meanings: a "weighty decision" is important, not physically heavy. Word roots can illuminate; usage determines meaning.

## 28. DOES QADOSH SIMPLY MEAN "SET APART"?

Not adequately. Separation or consecration helps explain holiness, but God's holiness also involves His moral purity, majesty, glory, and unique divine character. No one sets God apart and makes Him holy. He is holy in Himself.



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

## 29. WHY CAN WORD ROOTS MISLEAD?

Assuming that the meaning of a root must remain present in every related word is often called the **etymological fallacy** or **root fallacy**. The problem is not studying roots; it is allowing a proposed root meaning to override actual biblical usage. James Barr's influential work on biblical semantics helped expose the danger of building theology from roots or word histories instead of usage.

### Responsible Order

CONTEXT → ACTUAL USAGE → GRAMMAR → COMPARISON WITH OTHER PASSAGES → LEXICAL TOOLS → ETYMOLOGY WHEN HELPFUL

## 30. WHAT ABOUT HEBREW PICTOGRAPHS AND "HIDDEN MEANINGS"?

Hebrew letters have a history, and some letter forms ultimately developed from earlier pictorial signs. But biblical Hebrew words communicate through normal vocabulary, grammar, syntax, context, and usage. A word's meaning is not established by assigning symbolic theological meanings to individual letters and combining them into a hidden message.

### Memory Anchor

The Bible's depth is found in what Scripture communicates, not in secret meanings imposed on its letters.

## 31. HOW CAN STRONG'S NUMBERS HELP - AND MISLEAD?

Strong's numbers are useful identifiers. They help readers locate the underlying word and find other occurrences. But they do not tell readers which possible meaning belongs in a particular verse. **Strong's number = identification tool, not automatic interpretation.**

## 32. WHAT ARE BDB AND HALOT?

**BDB** - the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon - is a classic Biblical Hebrew reference. **HALOT** - the Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament - is a major modern scholarly lexicon. Lexicons describe possible meanings, usage, grammatical information, and related forms. The reader must still ask which meaning fits the passage.

## 33. WHAT DOES THE SEPTUAGINT ADD?

The Septuagint (LXX) is the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. It shows how ancient Jewish translators understood passages when rendering them into Greek and helps trace connections into the New Testament. One Hebrew word does not always map onto one Greek word, and one Greek word does not always map back onto one Hebrew word. The LXX is valuable, but it is not a mechanical Hebrew-to-Greek dictionary.

## 34. WHAT ABOUT ARAMAIC AND LATER JEWISH USAGE?

Parts of the Old Testament, especially portions of Daniel and Ezra, are written in Aramaic. Ancient translations, Second Temple Jewish writings, rabbinic literature, and later Hebrew can sometimes illuminate how language developed. But later usage must not automatically be imported into earlier passages. For example, later Jewish usage strongly associates *zedakah* with charitable giving, while biblical *tsedaqah* has a broader righteousness/justice range.

## 35. DOES JESUS REVEAL THE FULLER BIBLICAL IDEA BEHIND OT WORDS?

Yes - but not by revealing "secret Hebrew definitions." Jesus fulfills and develops themes already present throughout Scripture: wholehearted love of God (Mark 12:28-30), holiness (Mark 1:21-28; Hebrews 7:26-27), glory (John 1:14; 17:1-5), peace (John 14:27; Romans 5:1), and righteousness (Romans 3:21-26). The better conclusion is that the Old Testament establishes concepts and promises the New Testament develops and brings into focus through Jesus.



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

### 36. CAN SOMEONE UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE WITHOUT KNOWING HEBREW?

Yes. Biblical languages are valuable, but readers should not be made to feel that the “real Bible” is inaccessible without specialized language training. A trustworthy English translation communicates God’s Word faithfully. Hebrew can clarify difficult passages, reveal wordplay, explain translation differences, illuminate semantic range, and sharpen interpretation - but it should build confidence in careful Bible reading rather than dependence upon someone claiming hidden meanings.

#### Memory Anchor

Hebrew can deepen Bible study. It does not create a secret Bible behind the English Bible.

### 37. HOW SHOULD A BEGINNER INVESTIGATE A WORD OR TRANSLATION DIFFERENCE?

1. **Read the whole passage.** Never begin with the dictionary and ignore the paragraph.
2. **Compare several trustworthy translations.** Notice where wording differs.
3. **Check footnotes.** Translators often identify another possible rendering or manuscript reading.
4. **Ask what kind of difference it is:** semantic range, grammar, translation style, or manuscript evidence?
5. **Identify the original word when relevant.** A concordance or Bible-study tool can help.
6. **Examine the word’s range.** Notice how it is used elsewhere.
7. **Use a lexicon if available.** Strong’s is a starting point, not the finish line.
8. **If a manuscript note appears, read it carefully.** Do not assume a bracketed passage means translators are removing Scripture.
9. **Return to the passage.** Ask which reading and translation best fit the available evidence and context.
10. **Check the larger biblical context.** Do not make a word-study or textual conclusion carry more theological weight than Scripture gives it.

#### The Rule to Remember

Do not ask, “What exciting things could this word possibly mean?” Ask, “What is the biblical author communicating here?”

### WHERE CAN I PRACTICE THIS?

**STEP Bible** - a free resource for comparing translations and exploring underlying Hebrew and Greek vocabulary.

**Blue Letter Bible** - accessible concordance, interlinear, lexical, and cross-reference tools.

**Strong’s Concordance** - useful for identifying and locating words, but not sufficient by itself for interpretation.

**BDB** - classic Hebrew lexicon for deeper study.

**HALOT** - major scholarly Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon.

**Interlinears** are useful bridges into the biblical languages, but they still require context-first interpretation. Seeing the original word does not automatically reveal what it means in a particular verse.

#### Resource Safeguard

Listing a resource does not mean 3Nails endorses every interpretation, article, theological position, note, or conclusion it contains. Compare tools and continually return to Scripture.

### QUICK REFERENCE

#### Nephesh H5315

Soul; life; self; person; living being

#### Ruach H7307

Spirit; wind; breath

#### Lev / Levav H3820 / H3824

Heart; inner person

#### Shama H8085

Hear; listen; heed

#### Yada H3045

Know; recognize; understand

#### Yirah H3374

Fear; reverence; awe

#### Hesed H2617

Steadfast love; kindness; mercy; faithful love

#### Shalom H7965

Peace; welfare; well-being; completeness

#### Tsedeq / Tsedaqah H6664 / H6666

Righteousness; justice; rightness

#### Mishpat H4941

Judgment; justice; legal decision

#### Qadosh H6918

Holy; sacred

#### Kavod H3519

Glory; honor



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

## REVIEW AND RETENTION

1. **What is semantic range?** The range of meanings a word can have in different contexts.
2. **Does a Hebrew word carry every possible meaning every time?** No. Context determines which meaning is active.
3. **Does nephesh always mean an immaterial "soul"?** No. It can also refer to life, self, a person, or a living being.
4. **What can ruach mean?** Spirit, wind, or breath.
5. **Why can "heart" be misunderstood?** Biblical heart language can include thoughts, intentions, understanding, desires, and will - not merely emotion.
6. **Does shama literally mean "hear and obey" every time?** No. It can mean hear or listen, while some contexts imply heeding or obedience.
7. **Does yada always mean intimate knowledge?** No. Its range includes ordinary knowledge as well as personal or experiential knowing.
8. **Is yirah only terror?** No. Depending on context, it can include fear, reverence, and awe.
9. **Why is hesed translated several ways?** Its range can include kindness, mercy, loyalty, steadfast love, and faithful devotion.
10. **Does shalom literally mean "nothing missing, nothing broken"?** No. That may illustrate wholeness but is not its literal universal definition.
11. **Does tsedaqah simply mean charity?** No. That association is especially important in later Jewish usage; biblical usage is broader.

12. **Does qadosh simply mean "set apart"?** No. Set-apartness matters, but God's holiness is richer than separation alone.
13. **Does kavod always mean physical weight?** No. It commonly means glory, honor, dignity, or splendor.
14. **Is a more literal translation always more accurate?** No. Meaning sometimes requires moving beyond exact word-for-word form.
15. **Why can good translations differ?** Semantic range, grammar, idioms, translation philosophy, interpretation, or manuscript evidence.
16. **What is textual criticism?** Comparing surviving manuscripts to determine the earliest recoverable wording.
17. **Do brackets around Mark 16 or John 8 mean translators are removing the Bible?** No. They usually indicate differing manuscript evidence.
18. **Why "brothers" vs. "brothers and sisters"?** The original expression may be grammatically masculine while functioning as an address to a mixed group.
19. **What do the three worked examples teach?** Nephesh, shama, and ruach show that translation must communicate contextual meaning rather than mechanically assigning one English word to every occurrence.
20. **What is a Strong's number for?** Identifying an underlying Hebrew or Greek word - not automatically interpreting it.
21. **Most important word-study rule?** Context determines meaning.

## SIX TRUTHS TO REMEMBER

1. **TRANSLATION REQUIRES CHOICES.** Different languages rarely match word-for-word in every situation.
2. **ONE HEBREW WORD MAY REQUIRE SEVERAL ENGLISH WORDS.** That is normal translation, not evidence Scripture has been corrupted.
3. **NOT EVERY BIBLE DIFFERENCE IS A TRANSLATION DIFFERENCE.** Some involve manuscript evidence rather than word meaning.
4. **CONTEXT CONTROLS MEANING.** A word does not mean everything it could possibly mean every time it appears.
5. **ROOTS AND ETYMOLOGY ARE SERVANTS, NOT MASTERS.** Word history can help, but actual biblical usage carries greater interpretive weight.
6. **HEBREW STUDY SHOULD BUILD CONFIDENCE, NOT CREATE SECRET KNOWLEDGE.** The goal is better reading of Scripture, not dependence upon impressive-sounding claims.

## PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

### DAY 1 - NEPHESH

Read Genesis 2:7; Psalm 42:1-5; Psalm 103:1-5. Ask how nephesh is rendered.

### DAY 2 - RUACH

Read Genesis 1:1-2; 8:1; Ezekiel 37:1-14. Ask how context determines wind, breath, or spirit.

### DAY 3 - HEART

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-6; Proverbs 4:20-27; 1 Samuel 16:7. What activities are associated with the heart?

### DAY 4 - HEARING AND KNOWING

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 139:1-6. When does hearing imply response?

### DAY 5 - COMPARE TRANSLATIONS

Read one passage in NASB, ESV, NIV, and NLT if available. Which differences reflect style or semantic choice?

### DAY 6 - READ THE FOOTNOTES

Read Mark 16:9-20; John 7:53-8:11; 1 John 5:7-8 in several translations. What do the notes say about manuscripts?

### DAY 7 - JESUS

Read John 1:1-18; Romans 3:21-26; Romans 5:1-11. How do glory, righteousness, grace, truth, and peace converge in Christ?



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

## A SCRIPTURE PATH FOR CONTINUED STUDY

Genesis 2:7 - Humanity becomes a living nephesh  
Genesis 8:1 - Ruach translated as wind  
Exodus 34:6-7 - God's hesed and faithful character  
Deuteronomy 6:4-9 - Shama and wholehearted love for God  
1 Samuel 15:22 - Hearing and obedience  
1 Samuel 16:7 - God looks at the heart  
Psalm 19 - God's glory and God's Word  
Psalm 23 - God's hesed  
Psalm 42 - Nephesh language in longing for God  
Psalm 85 - Righteousness and peace  
Psalm 103 - Nephesh, mercy, and God's character  
Psalm 139 - God's personal knowledge  
Proverbs 1:7 - Fear of the LORD and knowledge  
Proverbs 4:23 - Guarding the heart

Proverbs 9:10 - Fear of the LORD and wisdom  
Isaiah 6:1-8 - God's holiness and glory  
Isaiah 32:16-18 - Righteousness and peace  
Jeremiah 17:5-10 - The human heart  
Ezekiel 36:26-27 - New heart and God's Spirit  
Ezekiel 37:1-14 - Ruach as breath, wind, and spirit  
Micah 6:8 - Justice, hesed, and humility  
Mark 16:9-20 - Major New Testament textual-variant passage  
John 1:14-18 - God's glory revealed in Jesus  
John 7:53-8:11 - Major New Testament textual-variant passage  
John 14:27 - The peace Jesus gives  
Romans 3:21-26 - God's righteousness revealed through Christ  
Romans 5:1-11 - Peace with God through Jesus  
1 John 5:7-8 - A well-known textual variant involving later expanded wording

## FINAL MEMORY ANCHORS

• A word has a range of possible meanings; context determines which meaning is active. • A helpful English translation does not need to reproduce every possible sense of a Hebrew word. • The biblical heart is more than emotion. • Biblical hearing often calls for response, but shama does not always literally mean "hear and obey." • God's personal knowledge does not depend on turning yada into a secret definition. • "Set apart" helps explain holiness but does not exhaust it. • A word's root may illuminate its history; the sentence tells what it means there. • Some Bible differences come from word meaning; others come from manuscript evidence. • Strong's identifies a word; it does not interpret the passage. • Hebrew and Greek can deepen Bible study; they do not create a secret Bible behind the English Bible.

## FINAL TAKEAWAY

Hebrew word study can make familiar passages feel richer because languages do not divide meaning in exactly the same ways. Nephesh, ruach, lev/levav, shama, yada, yirah, hesed, shalom, tsedeq/tsedaqah, mishpat, qadosh, and kavod all demonstrate that English translators sometimes must choose among several legitimate possibilities.

None of this means English Bibles have hidden or removed the real message of Scripture. Sometimes differences between English Bibles come from translation style; sometimes from semantic range or grammar; and sometimes from differences among surviving manuscripts. Semantic study asks what a word can mean. Translation asks how that meaning should be communicated. Textual criticism asks which ancient wording is best supported. Responsible Bible study keeps those categories clear.

This protects readers from impressive-sounding claims that exceed the evidence: "Shama literally means hear and obey." "Yada always means intimate covenant knowledge." "Shalom literally means nothing missing and nothing broken." "Qadosh simply means set apart." "Kavod literally means weight." Each turns something related to a word into more than the biblical evidence supports. Scripture does not need exaggeration to become profound.

The biblical storyline ultimately leads beyond individual words to the One toward whom Scripture points. Jesus reveals the Father. He displays God's glory. He is holy and righteous. He brings peace with God. He transforms hearts. He gives the Spirit. Through Him God's steadfast saving purposes reach their fulfillment.

Learning Hebrew vocabulary can enrich Bible reading. Learning how translation works can deepen confidence in Scripture. Learning why manuscripts sometimes differ can replace unnecessary suspicion with informed attention to the evidence. The greatest benefit comes when these tools send the reader back to the passage, back to the biblical storyline, and ultimately back to Jesus.

**The goal is not to know impressive Hebrew words. The goal is to know God more faithfully through His Word.**

Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus