



Hebrew Language and Culture

Michael Natt

Nes Gadol (A Great Miracle)

- “Nes gadol haya sham.” (נס גדול היה שם)
 - A great miracle **happened there**. (perfect tense)
- “Nes gadol yiheyeh po.” (נס גדול יהיה פה)
 - A great miracle **will happen here**. (imperfect tense)

MARVIN R. WILSON

OUR FATHER
ABRAHAM

JEWISH ROOTS of the
CHRISTIAN FAITH

- *Second Edition* -





Hebraic Roots

“The roots of Christianity run deep into Hebrew soil. Though the Hebrew heritage of the church is rich and extensive, many Christians are regrettably uninformed about it. Most of it has been treated either passively and superficially or more often, it has simply been left unexplored.” (Marvin Wilson)



Hebraic Roots

- God
- Salvation
- Messiah
- The Holy Spirit
- The Priesthood
- The Covenants
- The Fathers
- The Kingdom of God
- Baptism
- The Lord's Supper



The Council of Nicaea

“So, on the one hand, we need to celebrate the Council of Nicaea for its powerful, bold Christology—in rejecting the idea that the son of God was created and embracing his deity. But on the other hand, we must recognize that Nicaea was another step in de-Judaizing the Church. It was another step in the ethnic cleansing of the New Testament from its Jewish roots.” (Marvin Wilson)



Hebrew vs Greek Thought

While admiring the Greek contributions to civilization — its language, politics, philosophy, art and architecture — it is easy to forget what Greek society was really like.

For example, we've heard of the "Spartan lifestyle," but what did that mean in practice? Well, for starters, at the age of seven, Spartan boys were separated from their parents; they lived in military barracks where they were beaten, and not even given minimal food to encourage them to steal. To be Spartan meant to be tough.



Hebrew vs Greek Thought

Aristotle argued in his *Politics* that killing children was essential to the functioning of society. He wrote:

"There must be a law that no imperfect or maimed child shall be brought up. And to avoid an excess in population, some children must be exposed [i.e. thrown on the trash heap or left out in the woods to die]. For a limit must be fixed to the population of the state."

Note the tone of his statement. Aristotle isn't saying "I like killing babies," but he is making a cold, rational calculation: over-population is dangerous; this is the most expedient way to keep it in check.

Hebrew vs Greek Thought

The Greeks showcased all human talents — literature, drama, poetry, music, architecture, sculpture, etc. They glorified the beauty of the human body, displaying athletic prowess in the Olympics.

Human passions were venerated and this meant there were few sexual taboos — even pedophilia. The sexual initiation of a young boy by an older man was considered the highest form of love and vital part of a boys education. Plato wrote of this in his *Symposium* (178C):

"I, for my part, am at a loss to say what greater blessing a man can have in earliest youth than an honorable [older] lover ..."



Hebrew vs Greek Thought

The Greeks introduced into human consciousness an idea which is going to come into play as one of the most powerful intellectual forces in modern history — humanism. The human being is the center of all things. The human mind and its ability to understand and observe and comprehend things rationally is the be-all-and-end-all. That's an idea which comes from the Greeks.

Above all, the Greeks thought that this was enlightenment, the highest level of civilization. They had a strong sense of destiny and believed that their culture was ordained to become the universal culture of humanity.



Hebrew vs Greek Thought

The Jews had a different vision. The Jews believed that a world united in the belief in one God and ascribing to one absolute standard of moral values — including respect for life, peace, justice, and social responsibility for the weak and poor — was the ultimate future of the human race.

This Jewish ideology was wedded to an extreme, uncompromising exclusivity of worship (as demanded by the belief in one God) and a complete intolerance of polytheistic religious beliefs or practices. There was only one God and so only one God could be worshipped, end of story.



Hebrew vs Greek Thought

To the Jews, human beings were created in the image of God. To the Greeks, gods were made in the image of human beings. To the Jews, the physical world was something to be perfected and elevated spiritually. To the Greeks the physical world was perfect. In short, to Greeks, what was beautiful was holy; to the Jews what was holy was beautiful.

The Hebrew Mindset

“The biblical writers reflect a Hebrew mind-set. These authors find their primary orientation in the Semitic culture of the East. Christianity does not derive from pagan, Hellenistic sources. Christian faith is divinely revealed and is securely anchored in the Hebrew Bible – the Law, Prophets and Writings. God breathed his word into the minds of the biblical authors within a Jewish cultural environment. To ignore Hebraic ways of thinking is to subvert Christian understanding.”

(John Dillenberger, “Revelational Discernment and the Problem of the Two Testaments,” in *The Old Testament and Christian Faith*)



The Hebrew Context

We have developed a TV-obsessed, entertainment-prone and spectator-minded generation which seems to be content to watch life rather than to live it. By contrast, the Hebrews were largely an energetic, robust, and at times, even turbulent people. They were primarily outdoor folk – farmers, fisherman, tradesmen who lived life to the full. For them, truth was not so much an idea to be contemplated as an experience to be lived, a deed to be done.

The Hebrew Language

The Bible contains many Hebraisms in which abstract thoughts or immaterial conceptions are conveyed through material or physical terminology.

- “look” is “lift up the eyes” (Genesis 22:4)
- “be angry” is “burn in one’s nostrils” (Exodus 4:14)
- “reveal” is “unstop someone’s ears” (Ruth 4:4)
- “have no compassion” is “hard-heartedness” (1 Samuel 6:6)
- “get ready” is “gird up the loins” (Jeremiah 1:17)
- “be determined” is “set one’s face to” (Jeremiah 42:16)

Anthropomorphisms

The attribution of human characteristics or behavior to God

- The Ten Commandments were “inscribed by the finger of God.” (Exodus 31:18)
- Isaiah states, “Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.” (Isaiah 59:1)
- “The eyes of the Lord are everywhere.” (Proverbs 15:3)
 - The LORD is watching everywhere. (NLT)

In Hebrew thought the essence of true godliness is tied primarily to a relationship with God, not a creed.

Hebrew Thought

The Hebrews have sometimes been described as a very visceral people (The Jews require a sign).

- The heart
 - May love (Deuteronomy 6:5)
 - May fear (Deuteronomy 28:65)
 - May sin (Jeremiah 17:9)
- The bowels or intestines feel anguish (Jeremiah 4:19)
- The liver may experience the horror of Jerusalem's fall. (Lamentations 2:11)
- In the kidneys one may rejoice. (Proverbs 23:16)

David

The warrior-king David, a skillful musician and poet, provides a notable biblical example of one giving open expression to both extreme excitability and deep depression. David's emotions ran with the flow of his life. When the ark was brought to Jerusalem, he leaped and danced before the Lord "with all his might." (2 Samuel 6:14-16). When his child borne by Bathsheba became sick and died, he wept and fasted for a week and spent the nights lying on the ground. (2 Samuel 12:15-23)

The Psalms of David allow us to peer into some of the deepest emotional crevices of the human heart.

Holidays

A brief summary of the holidays in the Bible reveals a decisive emphasis on the release of emotion, especially joy.

- The Sabbath is a time of rejoicing. (Isaiah 58:13-14)
- Rosh Hashanah celebrates the creation of the world.
- Sukkot/Tabernacles is the festival of rejoicing. (Leviticus 23:40)
- Hanukkah/Feast of Dedication commemorates freedom won by the Maccabean revolt.
- Purim celebrates the overthrow of Haman.
- Passover celebrates the freedom from Egypt.
- Pentecost was celebrated with singing and dancing.

The Power of Poetry

About one-third of the Hebrew Bible is poetry. Poetry was a welcome aid to memory. An abundant use of figures of speech enhanced Scriptures liveliness, creativity and depth of meaning.

- Joy is expressed through metaphor: All the trees of the field will clap their hands. (Isaiah 55:12)
- The mountains sing. (Psalm 98:8)
- Hide me in the shadow of your wings. (Psalm 17:8)
- Nature is personified. Stars fight. (Judges 5:20)
- Mountains skip. (Psalm 114:6)
- The heavens declare God's glory. (Psalm 19:1)

Block Logic

The Greeks often used a tightly contained step logic whereby one would argue from premises to a conclusion, each step linked tightly to the next in a coherent, rational, logical fashion.

By contrast, the Hebrews often made use of block logic. That is, concepts were expressed in self-contained units or blocks of thought.

The book of Exodus says that Pharaoh hardened his heart, but it also says that God hardened it. The prophets teach that God is both wrathful and merciful. Messiah is both the “Lamb of God” and the “Lion of the tribe of Judah.”



Contrasts

The Hebrew mind could handle the dynamic tension of the language of paradox.

Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are compatible.

The Bible tends to reject most carefully worked-out charts and attempts at schematization. Neither God nor His Word may be easily contained in a box for logical or scientific analysis. Both God and His Word have a sovereign unpredictability that defies logic and human explanation.

The Semites of Bible times did not simply think truth – they experienced it.



Types and Shadows

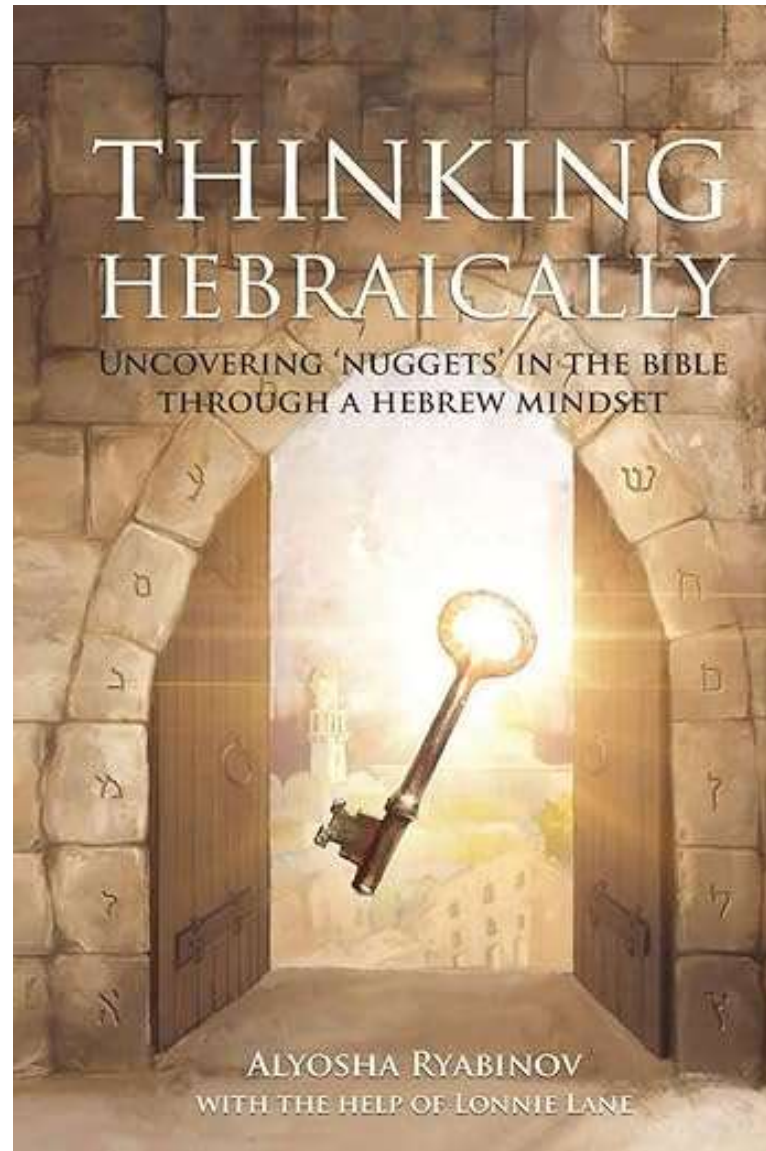
Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a **type** (tupos – figure) of Him who was to come. (Romans 5:14)

For the law, having a **shadow** (skia – sketch) of the good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. (Hebrews 10:1)



THINKING HEBRAICALLY

UNCOVERING 'NUGGETS' IN THE BIBLE
THROUGH A HEBREW MINDSET



ALYOSHA RYABINOV
WITH THE HELP OF LONNIE LANE

Right

■ Psalm 16:8

ח שׁוֹיֵתִי יְהוָה לְפָנָי תָּמִיד: כִּי מִיְמִינִי, בַּל-אֶמוּט.

8 I have set the LORD always before me; surely He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Left

■ Ecclesiastes 10:2

ב לֵב חָכָם לְיְמִינוֹ, וְלֵב פֶּסֶל לְשְׂמֹאלוֹ.

2 A wise man's understanding is at his right hand; but a fool's understanding at his left.



Left Brain – Right Brain

As for the likeness of their faces, *each* had the face of a man; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side. (Ezekiel 1:10)

Who is the servant and who is the ruler?



You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me. (John 5:39)

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)

Genealogy of Genesis 5

Adam	<i>Man (is)</i>
Seth	<i>Appointed</i>
Enosh	<i>Mortal</i>
Kenan	<i>Sorrow; (but)</i>
Mahalalel	<i>The Blessed God</i>
Jared	<i>Shall come down</i>
Enoch	<i>Teaching</i>
Methuselah	<i>His death shall bring</i>
Lamech	<i>The Despairing</i>
Noah	<i>Comfort, Rest</i>