

A Hebrew Insight That Breaks the Yoke

One of the favorite sayings of charismatics and Pentecostals is that “the anointing breaks the yoke,” and while it is a true statement, it’s actually based on a mistranslation of the Bible. What the original Hebrew text says is much better.

But first, so you don’t think I’m trying to burst anyone’s bubble, let me affirm that the anointing of the Spirit does, indeed, break the yoke of captivity. As Jesus announced in His hometown synagogue in Nazareth, the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him because the Lord had anointed Him to “proclaim good news to the poor ... to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18, ESV).

So, yes, clearly, the Spirit’s anointing brings liberty to captives, and that means breaking yokes (see also Acts 10:38). At the same time, it is a mistranslation in the King James Version of Isaiah 10:27 that gave rise to the saying “the anointing breaks the yoke.”

In the KJV, the verse reads, “And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing.”

What does the original Hebrew say? To put it in Hebrew-English, the text reads, “The yoke shall be destroyed because of *shamen*” (pronounced SHA-MEN). What does the word *shamen* mean? The KJV translators understood it to be the equivalent of *shemen*, oil, which apparently led them to think of oil for anointing, and then to the anointing itself.

This is obviously quite a leap—really, an impossible leap—and there is nowhere in the Hebrew Bible where the word *shemen*,

oil, by itself, means “anointing.” (For those with little or no Hebrew background, it was fine for the KJV translators to equate *shamen* with *shemen*; they simply erred when they translated it “anointing.”)

What, then, is the text actually saying? It’s best to understand *shamen* here as “fatness” (pronounced SHA-MEYN), which would produce a literal translation of, “The yoke will be destroyed because of the fat.” But what does that mean?

The New International Version expresses it well: “In that day their burden will be lifted from your shoulders, their yoke from your neck; the yoke will be broken because you have grown so fat.”

Do you get the picture? Here is an ox with a yoke on its neck, enslaving it to the will of its master, forcing it to a life of servitude. But eventually, it gets so healthy and fat that the yoke simply bursts from off its neck. That ox is now free!

And that is a picture for each of us when we find ourselves bound or oppressed or beaten into submission by the enemy. We simply feed our spirits the living Word day and night, we continue in worship and praise and prayer and communion, and little by little, we get so healthy and strong—so “fat”—that suddenly the yoke of oppression has to burst. The fatness destroys the yoke!

Now you know what the Word really says. Put it into practice, and you will be blessed. It’s time to break the yokes!

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