

This One Little Word in the Bible Changes Everything

Yes, one word can make a difference

For more than seven years, I was a part of the translation team for the Tree of Life Version Bible. In my role as the Theology Team Facilitator (a big name that translates to “cat herder”), I came to truly understand just how the choice of one word can change the entire context and understanding of Scripture, and changing one Scripture’s understanding can change the understanding of a chapter, a book or even the entire Bible. Words are powerful, and changing one word can either enhance or damage the understanding of a biblical concept.

Most people who study the Bible are at least aware of word choices and why some Bibles are more literal translations while others are more dynamic equivalent or paraphrases. What many people don’t think about is how words outside the sacred text but within the pages of the Bible can also change, adjust, shift or even direct our understandings either in a positive or a negative way.

You may be wondering what I am speaking about. I am talking about things such as chapter headings, headings inserted within the text and even the names of biblical books. Headings are not inspired Scripture as the text is. The translators inserted the headings so you would view the text the way they believe it should be viewed. These headings are designed as road signs to lead the reader through the text. Headings were provided by the translators of your Bible so that as you read the text, you would be directed by the heading to view the text according to the desire or belief system of the translators.

Let me provide one example that I hope will cause you to review every heading in your Bible to see if they change the way you view the text. In your Bible in Matthew 26, somewhere around verse 17 or 18, it probably says something like “The Last Supper” or “Jesus’ Last Supper.” While in verses 17, 18 and 19 the text tells us that Yeshua (Jesus) was participating in the traditional Passover Seder or Passover Meal. It wasn’t just a supper like a condemned man’s “Last Meal.” The text shares that Yeshua kept the Passover fully, even including the time of praise and worship on the night he was to be tried, convicted and executed.

Another major example is the name of the book of Leviticus. Leviticus is the English name of the third book in the Torah. Yet the Hebrew name of the book is *Vayikra* which means “called” or “called out.” While Leviticus comes from the Latin word describing the tribe of Levi.

You may be saying, “So what?” Well, let me try to explain. If you look at the book of Vayikra as a book about the Levites, you start out with a bad foundation for understanding its purpose. It may start out with instructions about what the Levites were to do and about the sacrificial system, but the book itself is about G-D calling His people. This book provides the instruction and lifestyle for those who have been called out by G-D. This book provides within its pages information and prophetic promises that lead us to Yeshua. It provides within its pages the plan of redemption, atonement and resurrection. But all of it is directed not at the priests or priesthood but at those who would be ministered to and that atonement would be provided for.

If a believer today reads this book as Leviticus, they can rightly wonder, *What does this book have to do with me?* After all, there are no Levites serving today, no high priest making sacrifices or entering the holy of holies, and no tabernacle or temple for me to go to three times a year. This book becomes irrelevant to them. But if we read this book as

Vayikra, "And G-D Called," we read it as part of His called-out people. We understand that the book is not focused upon the priesthood and priests but on the children of Israel. And we know everything in the book is relevant to us today because we are the directed targets of the book Called of G-D. The book is relevant because we know we have a high priest, Yeshua. It is relevant because as part of the called of G-D and because we have atonement in Yeshua, we walk in the ways and under the covenant provided to the called of G-D.

One simple change of one word even outside of the biblical text itself can still change dramatically how we read and understand the sacred text itself. *Vayikra*, like the rest of the Bible, was written about and to those who are the called of G-D. {eoa}

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