

The Hebrew Corner

A character trait whose importance is often stated in the Bible is that of humility. Did you know that there are five different Hebrew words in the Tanach that have the meaning “humble”?

In Exodus 10:3 we encounter the following, “And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews, how long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me? let my people go, that they may serve me.” The root of the Hebrew word translated as humble in this passage is anah (ענה ah-NAH), which can also mean afflict. Here we see that due to Pharaoh’s pride, he is unable to see God’s hand in the events unfolding.

A way of humbling ourselves in the presence of God is by fasting. The same Hebrew root anah is used in the following passage, Ezra 8:21, “Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him, a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.” Here “afflict” has the alternate translation “humble”. When we afflict and humble ourselves before God, we sacrifice our own wants and desires, and focus on God and how to please him.

In Leviticus 26:11 we read the following, “And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the

land of their enemies, if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity.” Here the Hebrew root used is kanah (כָּנַע kah-NAH), that also may be translated as subdued. We see a picture of the Israelites needing to accept God’s punishment in sending them into captivity. God requires that they humble themselves in accepting his judgment, and that he will then grant them favor, and return them to their land.

There are some situations where humbling ourselves is undesirable, as seen in Isaiah 2:9, “And the mean man boweth down and the great man humbleth himself, therefore forgive them not.” In this case the passage is referring to the Hebrew people humbling themselves and bowing down before idols. The Hebrew root used here is shaphal (שָׁפַל shah-FAHL). We should not bow down to or worship idols, which we make with our own hands, or in our own minds. The idols could be people, money, jobs, or anything or anyone other than God.

In Proverbs 6:3 we are instructed, “Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend.” The word used here is from the Hebrew root raphas (רָפַס rah-FAHS). Here the passage indicates that we should put our friendship first and our pride last. Who is right or wrong is not important, but to make certain and nurture your friendship.

Finally, we have the following passage, Isaiah 2:11, “The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. The Hebrew root translated here as humbled is shachach (שָׁחַח shah-CHACH; *pronounce CH from the back of the throat, as in the German composer Bach*). Shachach can also mean, be bowed down or laid prostrate. This is a passive form of humility, as all will be humbled in the presence of the Lord. In the last day, when Jesus returns, every knee will be bowed and every tongue will confess that he is Lord.

Remember Proverbs 19:16, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” The Bible makes it clear, that to honor God and his word, and to develop a closer relationship with the Lord so that we can be a blessing to our families and others, that we should make being humble a part of our daily lives.