

## The Hebrew Corner

Directions in the land of Israel in biblical times were much different than in our day. We are used to looking at maps where north is up, south is down, west is left, and east is right. In ancient Israel, the orientation differed. Presented below is the concept of direction from the perspective of the Tanach:

The Mediterranean Sea, also known as hayam hagadol (הים הגדול, hah-YAHM hah-gah-DOHL), or the Great Sea, was (and currently is) on the western coast of Israel. In the ancient Hebrew perspective, the observer has his back to the sea, and so behind him is west. The Hebrew word for sea (ים, YAHM) then, also means west. The observer is looking toward the sunrise, so he is looking east, or in front of him, represented by the Hebrew word mizrach (מזרח, mihz-RAHCH), which means east or place of sunrise. To the left of the observer is the north, so the Hebrew word for left, samol (שמאל, suh-MOHL) also can mean north. To the right of his perspective is the desert area known as the Negev so the Hebrew word negev (נגב, NEH-gehv) can also mean south. So if you were to look at a map of Israel from a biblical perspective, you would see east as up, west as down, north as left, and south as right.

There is an alternative word for east in Hebrew, kedem (קדם, KEH-dehm), which is also used to mean ancient times. Thus it follows that from the Hebrew perspective of the time, the past, particularly the ancient past, is in front of you. Contrasted to this is the Hebrew word acharon (אחרון, ah-chah-ROHN) which in terms of position refers to that which is behind you, but in terms of time refers to the

latter or last time, presumably to what is commonly today referred to as the end times. The observer then has his back to the future, more specifically, the very end, and thus cannot see the future or his ultimate end.

There are biblical passages that refer to God bringing in judgment or chastening by means of an east wind, for example, the following passage from Exodus concerning the plague of locusts (Exodus 10:13):

“And Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night, and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts.”

In the book of Jonah, we are told that Jonah sat down on the easternmost part of Nineveh to see if God would judge the city. Instead the following passage indicates that Jonah was given a lesson from the east instead (Jonah 4:8):

“And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.”

The B'rit Hadashah (New Testament) indicates that Jesus, our Yeshua, will arrive from the east in his second coming (Matthew 24:27) when he comes in judgment:

“For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”

May we all stay continually in prayer, study of the word, and seeking after God, so that our future, although not clearly visible to us from

our perspective, is secure in his love, and the assurance he provides.  
May your month be tov meod – very good!