

The Hebrew Corner

The Hebrew text of the Tanach has some unusual features that have been preserved over many centuries. There are enlarged letters, shrunken letters, raised letters, inverted letters, even final forms of letters appearing in the middle of a word. What meaning and significance of these anomalous forms are has been a subject of debate over the years.

In Deutoronomy 6, there is a passage known to Jews as the Shema. The English translation (KJB) of the first verse of this passage is as follows (Deutoronomy 6:4):

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:”

Next, we see the actual Masoretic text in Hebrew:

שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד:

Notice that there are two enlarged letters, an ayin (ע) and a daleth (ד). These are not scribal mistakes but these features have been passed on through the ages by the scribes. Two possibilities that have been proposed involve the root word that is spelled by these two letters, עד which, depending on pronunciation, could be the Hebrew word ed (עד, AYD) meaning witness, or ad (עד, AHD) meaning forever. A case for both could be made based on the passage; we are to be a witness of the truth that the LORD is one LORD, and it true for all time.

Any translation of the Hebrew text will exclude all these special

characters, although considered part of the text. The authors were apparently inspired by God to insert these into the text to call attention to some portion of scripture. Let's consider the significance of another of these characters, the inverted nun (ך).

There appears in two books of the Tanach, Numbers and Psalms, a nun that has been flipped over horizontally, and is referred to as an inverted nun. The inverted nun first appears in the book of Numbers in the following passage (Numbers 10:35-36):

“And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel.”

Verse 36 is shown here in the Hebrew text so the reader can see the placement of the inverted nun:

ובנחה יאמר שובה יהוה רבבות אלפי ישראל: ך

The inverted nuns appear before and after this passage in the Hebrew text, indicative of some special significance to this text. Conjecture is that that the inverted nuns are placed there to call attention for the purpose of (1) indicating that the text is out-of-place and belongs in another part of scripture, or (2) that the entire passage should be considered a separate book of the Torah, with the portion of Numbers before the passage, and the portion after the passage also to be considered separate books of the Torah, making the total number of the books of Moses to be seven. However, let's look at the meaning instead, to give a possible explanation as to why the inverted nuns may be calling for special

attention to the passage. The passage is describing that God was the supreme commander of the tribes of Israel. The ark of the covenant of God would always precede the Israelites when they would journey. As the ark went forward, Moses encouraged God to rise up against the enemies of Israel, and when it halted, he implored God to return to his people. This may mean to us that when God's Holy Spirit moves within us, that we should be stirred up into service or ministry, and when the Holy Spirit tells us to wait, that we should seek out God's presence and draw near to him.

The second passage where the inverted nun is encountered is in Psalm 107 where it appears 7 times. Here is the translation of the verses before which the inverted nun appears (Psalm 107:21-26, 40):

“Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing. They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble ... He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, where there is no way.”

The passage starts off by exhorting us to give praise to God, testify to his great works, and to give thanks. Then the passage tells us that seafaring people observe the nature of God by seeing him in action on the seas. Verses 23-26 indicate that God is behind the rising and

falling of the waves, which may remind us of the rising and falling fortunes of our own life. However, as we saw in the previous passage in Exodus, God is in control. He allows us to go through some turbulent waters in our lives, but the ship remains safe. On the other hand, as shown in verse 40, God allows princes (perhaps symbolic of proud, arrogant people), to wander in the wilderness, without guidance. The separation of verse 40 from the other verses may be a demonstration of how far prideful people have become separated from God.

May we trust in God fully as we go through the storms of life, because we can be certain that God is in control. Have a happy, blessed month, and shalom to you and your families.