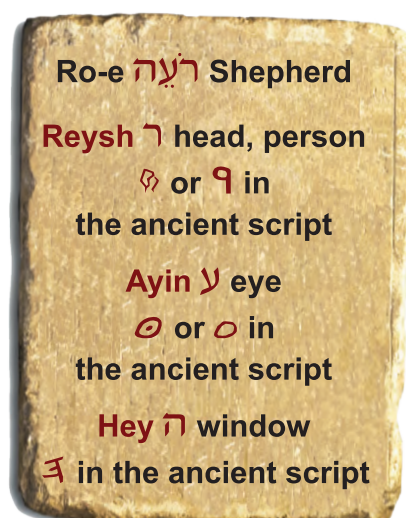


# An Introduction to Hebrew Word Pictures

## Some Personal History:

Over 30 years ago I attended my first Hebrew seminar. I don't know if I learned much Hebrew in that class, but there was one small piece of information that was thrown out and captured my imagination. Little did I know that what seemed to be a bit of trivia would result in one of the most fascinating intellectual pursuits of my life; and would change my relationship with my friends, my family, my wife and with the Lord.



The instructor at that seminar shared with us that Hebrew used to be an ideographic language (where pictures are used to describe a word). He demonstrated this point with the Hebrew word for shepherd.

The three letters in the Hebrew word רעה ro-e or shepherd are ר Reysh the head, ע Ayin the eye and ה Hey the window. Together these letters reveal the picture for a shepherd as a person looking out of the window, or as one who watches intently.



Other books also taught that although the 22 ancient Hebrew letters were all pictures, there are just a few examples of Hebrew ideograms remaining in the language today. I was confused as to why, if the letters were all pictures, could there not be at least another 5 or 10 Hebrew word pictures still remaining?

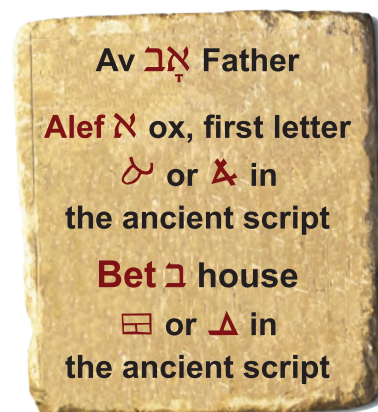
So, I looked to 4 resources that I was already using for Bible study purposes: *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, *Langenscheidt's Hebrew-English Dictionary*, the *Introductory Hebrew Grammar* by A. B. Davidson and a modern Hebrew dictionary.

Once I was familiar with the 22 Hebrew letters and their pictures, I began a search for more Hebrew word pictures. Where I began my search was simple enough: I started with the first word found in most every Hebrew-English Dictionary: Ab or father.

The two letters in the word Ab, (think abba) or father, are Alef the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and the picture of the head of an ox - symbolizing what is first or strong; and Bet, the house.

I was stunned. I expected to look for months or years. The first word was a clear, simple and profound word picture. But is there a better way to describe God's calling of a father than to call him the strength or leader of the house?

I was encouraged, but still had no idea just how much these were going to change my heart, relationships, understanding and life.



As I continued to look at the letter Alef, I found an astonishing number of very clear word pictures.

The word picture for אַח *ach* or *brother* is the *strong fence*, or one who protects...



The word picture for אִמָּה *em* or *mother* is the *strong water*, or the life giver...

The word picture for אֵשׁ *esh* or *fire* is the *strong teeth* or devourer...



The word picture for אֵל *El* or *God* is portrayed as the *Strong Controller* or *Shepherd*.

This book is an answer to my question of were there any more word pictures in Biblical Hebrew that I asked myself over 30 years ago. I now know there are more than 5 or 10 Hebrew word pictures still left in the language. In fact, the entire Biblical Hebrew language is composed of countless, simple, powerful and fascinating word pictures that beautifully illustrate the truths found in Scripture.

The word pictures present such an effective illustration of Scriptural principles that my wife Sally and I have felt their impact in our walk with the Lord and with one another. In the last 30 years our marriage has gone from shaky and disappointing to solid and fulfilling.

Of course there have been many tools God has used to accomplish this, but I think that it is significant that the Hebrew word pictures are one of those tools.

Our marriage ministry has grown from the changes God has wrought in our lives and we use the word pictures over and over again to reinforce the principles of love, selflessness and honoring God, family, friends and spouse.

One example of how a Hebrew word picture has changed the way that I relate to Sally, and others, is the ideogram for the Hebrew word for humble, which is to destroy the fence. I had to realize that the walls that I put around myself when I was mad at Sally were just as wrong as more blatant arrogance, like cruel criticism or seizing control. This means that I now know that when I am fighting my pride, I must knock down my walls. (To learn more about this word and my story turn to page 154 and read about the word for "humble.")

אֵל Alef אֵל ox - strong, first  
 חֵט Chet חֵט fence  
 אֵל Alef אֵל ox - strong, first  
 מֵם Mem מֵם water  
 אֵל Alef אֵל ox - strong, first  
 שֵׁן Sheen שֵׁן teeth  
 אֵל Alef אֵל ox - strong, first  
 לָמֶד Lamed לָמֶד staff

שַׁחַח חֵטֵּף Humble

שֵׁן שֵׁן teeth, devour  
 חֵט in the ancient script

חֵט חֵט fence  
 חֵט in the ancient script

## HISTORICAL AND SCHOLASTIC SUPPORT:

There are, on pages 106 and 107, partial lists of resources that clearly support my basic assumptions. Here is a quote from the *Encyclopedia of Judaism* that succinctly reinforces a relatively recent use and understanding of the Hebrew letters and their pictures.

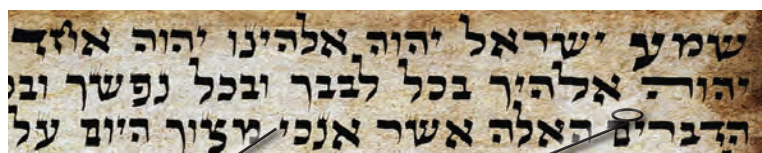


Page 48 of the *Encyclopedia of Judaism*\* reads:

“Hebrew inscriptions prove that their script is also employed by the Israelites and later was known as **כתב עברי** K'tav Ivri (Hebrew script). A form of it is still used by the Samaritans. In most signs of this early writing, the object is still recognizable and they are called by the name of those objects, such as aleph = ox, bet = house, and mem = water (depicting waves). This script is found in ancient inscriptions and was still used, even after its replacement, on certain Jewish coins, and in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls.”

There are dozens of Christian and Jewish resources that speak of the pictures within the Hebrew alphabet. There are some slight differences in some of the letters, but they all agree on the majority.

## HEBREW AND THE CHRISTIAN:



The Jot

The Tittle

### Most of the Bible was written in Hebrew

**Deuteronomy 6:4 written by a scribe still uses the Jot and the Tittle.**

Hebrew is vital to understanding much of what Jesus said because those jots and tittles are found only if you are reading in Hebrew. The Jot referred to the smallest of Hebrew letters, the letter Yood. The Tittle is the smallest part of a Hebrew letter, that often distinguished one letter from another. Every Hebrew letter was important to Jesus.

Hebrew is very important to every Christian. Moses, King David and Jesus were all Jewish. Most of the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament, was written by Jews. Even the word “Christian,” which is a Greek word, can only be properly understood by its Jewish meaning. “Christ” is a translation of the Hebrew word for Messiah.

A Christian who doesn’t understand his or her Jewish roots or Hebrew heritage will miss many of the wonders of what God has for their life.

To many Christians, the Hebrew language and even the Old Testament may seem outmoded or unimportant. Jesus did not think so. He not only quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures, but He said in Matthew 5:18 that not one jot or one tittle would pass from the Law until everything is fulfilled.



Hebrew was the language of Moses, David and Jesus

This book will take you back to the earliest form of Hebrew, the form that was used in the era of Moses and King David. Although the letters always carried the same meanings, the actual shape varied over the centuries. For the sake of clarity, I have chosen the clearest shape of each letter. All of the ancient letters that you see could have been read and understood by either Moses or King David.

\*McMillan Publishing Co., New York, New York © 1989

## THE PROPHETIC ROLE?

One of the most intriguing aspects of ancient Hebrew word pictures is the way some of the words seem to have a clear prophetic sense to them. Here are two examples:

### THE SIGN

The final letter in ancient Hebrew is *Tav* which in Hebrew means *a sign*. In modern Hebrew *Tav* is written ט, but the ancient Hebrew letter for *Tav* is ✠. Is it a coincidence that the symbol for *God's sign* is the *Cross*?



I believe it is important to remember that this ancient symbol of the Cross is not a Gentile symbol. The Cross is a Jewish symbol that means 'the sign'.

### RELIGION

The Hebrew word *dat* (דת or ✠ט) means a *Law* or *Decree* in the Bible and in modern Hebrew is used for *religion*. Remembering that Hebrew is read from right to left it becomes clear that the core of God's *Law* or *religion* is the ט door of the ✠ sign (or cross).



What does it say about the Word of God when even the letters, which existed before

the Bible was written, declare that the Bible is true? It is no coincidence that this is the language chosen for most of Scripture.

Over the last thirty plus years the Hebrew word pictures have proven themselves to me. For you, the search is just beginning.

This book contains some clues as to how the word pictures work and some of the scattered pieces of evidence to their validity. I hope this book will help you understand how the word pictures are formed. You will then begin to see the pictures for yourself. As the numbers of word pictures start to add up and the connections become obvious, you will feel their impact. When this happens, I hope you will experience the same awe I do, not for the word pictures, but for the One who gave us the Scriptures that the word pictures declare to be true.



### SISTER LANGUAGES: ARAMAIC, ARABIC, AMHARIC, SYRIAC...

You don't need to learn or study any of these languages. For some they will be interesting trivia and for others they will be a crucial source of understanding and clarity.

Biblical Hebrew is obviously limited to the Hebrew words used in the Bible. This creates a problem in understanding certain Hebrew words.

Imagine if all that we knew of English came from the Bible. So many words would be lost. Words used only once might be difficult to understand.

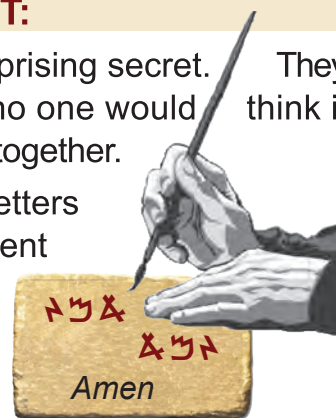
The answer for Biblical scholars for centuries has been to turn to the cognate languages, these are the languages that much like Italian, Spanish and Portuguese have a common heritage and many of the words can be understood by speakers of the other language.

## HEBREW AND OTHER LANGUAGES ARE IDENTICAL - BUT:

The languages that are closely related to Hebrew often share a surprising secret. They will use the same word, with even the same spelling and although no one would think it by looking at them, it is the ancient Hebrew that helps connect them all together.

An example is the word “Amen,” which when written in the ancient letters אָמֵן still show our letters א “A”, מ “M” and נ “N.” Reading the ancient letters of this word from right to left, it is easy to read the word “Amen.”

But when the same word is written in more modern Hebrew letters as אָמֵן *Amen*, it is easy to miss that *only the shape* of the letters has changed. It is the same word that you just easily read, but the shape of the letters has changed so much over thousands of years, that they no longer look the same.



This is true with the word for “Amen” in Syriac (ܐܡܝܢ *Amen*), in Amharic (አሚን *Amen*), and in Arabic (آمين *Amen*). Even though they look completely different, as you can see through the English spelling, they are the same word.

They are even written with the same letters. They all start with a version of the letter Alef א, followed by the letter Mem מ, and finally the letter Noon נ.

### THIS MEANS:

That when related languages have the same root or core words as Biblical Hebrew it opens our ability to study some of the Hebrew words, or the meaning of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and even names of letters that are seldom or never used in Scripture.

Ancient Hebrew can be found written on stone, broken pottery, papyrus and leather. Below is an example that refers to the Temple in Jerusalem:



This document reads...

“Just as Joash commanded you to give  
by the hand of Zechariah silver of Tarshish  
to the House of YHWH (בית יהוה).  
Three shekels.”

בית יהוה \* 99 \* 99

**The House of YHWH**

(pronounced *Bayeet Adonai*,  
which means “the House of the LORD”)

### AN IMPORTANT POINT:

Hebrew word pictures do not replace, define or limit Scripture. They *illustrate* Scripture. The word pictures are valid only when they agree with Scripture. (For more on this see the section *Learning the Basics of Hebrew Word Pictures* starting on page 100).