



Listening to the Language of the Bible

Companion
Bible Study

by

Lois Tverberg

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1. *Shema* – Listen and Obey (p. 3)

1. Read Ps. 4:1, then 2Ch. 6:19–27, which focuses on God “hearing” our oaths and prayers. How does knowing the Hebraic meaning of “hear” enrich your understanding of these words?

2. a. Read 1Sa. 1:20, where Hannah names her son Samuel, *Shmu-el*, which means “heard of God” or “God listened.” What is implied in his name?

b. Read the story of God’s talking to Samuel in 1Sa. 3:1–11. How does “listening” factor into the story? Why was Samuel given an important message that was intended for Eli?

3. Read Eze. 12:2, about people with eyes and ears that seem not to work. What did that really mean?

4. How good a “listener” are you, in actually “doing” what God tells you? Read Jesus’ words in Mt. 5:11–48. What is speaking most loudly to you? Choose one statement that you will “hear” by actually doing.

2. *Da'at Elohim* – Knowledge of God (p. 5)

1. Read the story of the tree of the “knowledge of good and evil” in Ge. 2:16–17 and 3:1–7. How does the idea of “knowledge” as personal experience affect your reading of that text?
2. A very literal translation of Pr. 12:10 is, “The righteous person **knows** the life of his animal.” Look it up in several Bible translations. How does the Hebraic definition of “know” fit with how it is translated?
3. Read Jer. 9:23–24. From these verses, what are the implications of knowing God experientially and devotionally?
4. How well do you feel you “know” the Lord experientially and devotionally in your life? A little or a lot?

3. *Yir'ah* – Fear, Awe, and Reverence (p. 7)

1. Read Dt. 10:12, about loving and fearing the Lord. Hebraically, how can we both love and fear the same person?
2. In the NASB, Eph. 5:21 speaks about the “fear of Christ”. If Paul was using a Hebraic connotation of “fear,” what does the “fear of Christ” mean?
3. Php. 2:12 talks about “working out your salvation in fear and trembling.” What would be another way of reading this, with the broader meaning of “fear,” that would give insight on this passage? (See also LLB p. 17–18.)
4. In your own life, which would you say you have more of: fear of God or reverence for him?

4. *Torah* – Law and Instruction (p. 9)

1. Read Ps. 1:1–3, and Ps. 119:1–20, substituting the word “teaching” for “law.” How does changing that word change the tone of these psalms? (Compare a Jewish Tanakh to a Christian Bible, if possible.)
2. Read Pr. 13:14 in the NIV. Usually the NIV renders *torah* as “law.” From this verse and those cited in question 1, how do the ideas of “teaching and “law” overlap? How would you explain in English what *torah* means?
3. The phrase “the Law and the Prophets” was an idiom that Jesus used to describe the Scriptures — the Pentateuch and writings of the prophets, and other books. How does knowing that affect your reading of the following passages?

Mt. 7:12

Lk. 16:16–17

4. Read Lev. 19. How do you feel personally about God’s laws when you read them? Do you feel burdened or joyful at having God’s “teaching”? How does that impact how you live?

5. *Shofet* – A Judge as a Savior? (p. 11)

1. Why is the book of Judges given that name? Why were people such as Sampson or Gideon, who won battles for the Israelites, called “judges”? (Hint: Study Bibles often explain this in the introduction to the book of Judges. Or, read the article, “A Judge as a Savior?” at www.en-gedi.org.)

2. The verses below are from the very literal New American Standard Bible (NASB). Read the verses in the NIV or another more “thought-for-thought” version. Why are “judge” or “judgment” translated as they are in the NIV in each verse?

Hear a just cause, O LORD, give heed to my cry;
Give ear to my prayer, which is not from deceitful lips.
Let my **judgment** come forth from Your presence;
Let Your eyes look with equity. Ps. 17:1–2

He will bring forth your righteousness as the light
And your **judgment** as the noonday. Ps. 37:6

A father of the fatherless and a **judge** for the widows,
Is God in His holy habitation. Ps. 68:5

3. Ps. 109:7 says about one of David’s enemies who has repaid him evil for good, “When he is judged, let him come forth guilty.” Is it OK to ask God to judge someone for something they have done?

Some Suggested Answers

1. Shema – Listen and Obey

1. Taken literally, asking God to “hear” our prayers makes it sound like he is deaf or disinterested. But in its Hebraic sense, “hearing” our prayers means to respond. In every petition, “hearing” means to take an action beyond hearing—forgiving, declaring innocence, helping, etc.
2. a. God heard and responded to her prayers and gave her a son.
b. Eli seemed to be deaf and blind to God’s will because he was ignoring the corruption of his sons. God chose to speak to Samuel because he was the one who would “hear” God by being obedient.
3. Both “seeing” and “hearing” imply a physical response to what is seen and heard. To restate the second sentence, “They see what I want and do not do it; they hear what I tell them but ignore my commands.”

2. Da’at Elohim – Knowledge of God

1. Thinking of knowledge hebraically would make the tree the “tree of the **experience** of Good and Evil.” It could be that rather than magically giving Eve mental comprehension, the tree gave her the opportunity to experience what sin really is -- rebellion against God’s commands.
2. The NIV and other translations have “care for.” It really speaks not of knowledge but of action - of the caretaking and devotion a person should show to his or her pets or farm animals.
3. To be devoted to a God who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness suggests that the person will also practice these things as well. To not care about doing them says that we really don’t know God, in the sense of walking intimately with him and obeying him.

3. Yir’ah – Fear, Awe, and Reverence

1. We show awe and reverence toward the person. Many of us have mentors, elders, or leaders for whom we have great respect, and earnestly desire their approval on our lives. We should love God in that way.
2. It is awe and reverence for our Savior and King, Jesus Christ, and a sense of his majesty and reign over our lives. Reverence for him should give us a longing to please him and have his approval.
3. Live out the life in relationship with God that you already have, with great awe and reverence for God.

4. Torah – Law and Instruction

1. It is hard to imagine “meditating on law” as a delight, but meditating on God’s teaching will give us wisdom and show us how to live. While “law” has a feeling of God as a heavy-handed ruler, the words “teaching” and “instruction” picture him as a loving father teaching his children.

2. Law tells us what we may and may not do. Teaching tells us what we ought to do, and if it comes from an authority like God, then we are obligated to obey. Teaching shows us how to live, and law shows us when we are doing wrong.

3. Mt. 7:12: Jesus says that the golden rule is the summary of all of what God spoke through Scriptures up until now.

Lk. 16:16-17: By reading the words as “the Scriptures,” we hear the idea of God’s Scriptures being taught up until John and Jesus’ time, and then Jesus coming to bring their promises to fulfillment.

5. Shofet – A Judge as a Savior?

1. The word “judge” can mean deliverer or defender, or it could refer to a leader in general. Sampson, Gideon and others were deliverers - heroes in battle who became leaders of Israel. The book of Judges describes when these judges ruled.

2. Ps. 17:2: The psalmist is asking for justice that will vindicate him and show his innocence.

Ps. 37:6: Once again, judgment is really about vindication: to be proven innocent instead of guilty.

Ps. 68:5: Here the word “judge” really means “defender,” as the one who brings justice to the helpless and oppressed.

3. By wanting justice to be done, we share with God an anger against sin, which is reasonable. But we are sinners as well, and when we ask for judgment, we are calling God to condemn our own sins too.

6. Shalom – How Is Your Peace?

1. David was asking about the welfare of the people, and how the war was going; *shalom* was not about peace, but about the well-being of things.

2. The *NET Bible* has “prosperity that will flow like a river,” thinking of *shalom* as material security and prosperity, not just peace. It is a parallelism with the next line about the wealth of the nations.

3. He is speaking of our spiritual health and state of being, and that he gives us wholeness and completeness. We prosper and grow spiritually because of his Spirit in our hearts and lives.