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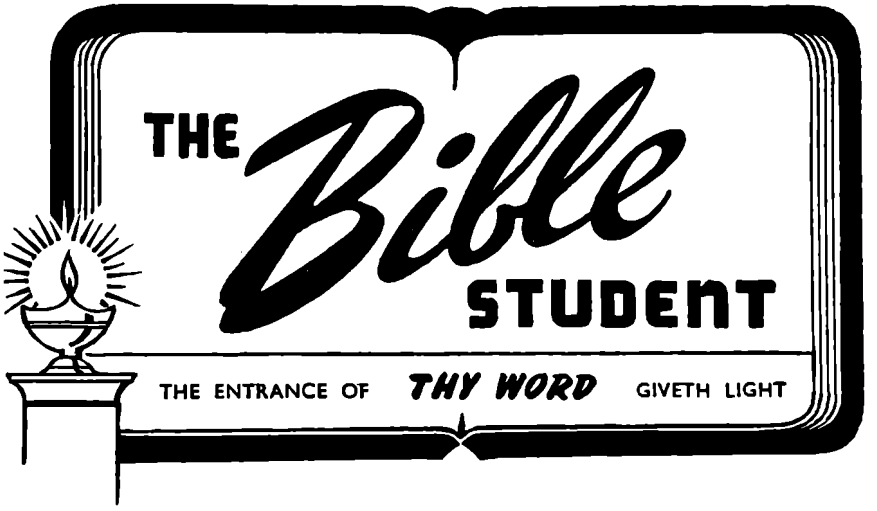

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BIBLICAL HEBREW WORDS

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Man and Woman

The fundamental word for man in general is *'adam*. Its derivation is given in Gen. 2:7, 'And Jehovah God formed the *'adam* of the dust of the *'adamah* (ground)'. There is a strong tendency today to question the traditional linking with the root *'dm*, to be red; the question is really academic, for it is the tillable soil which is ruddy rather than man.

In Greek thought, which influences us all, whether we realize it or not, it is a man's body which gives him his individuality, which divides up the spirit common to all men. For the Hebrew it was the possession of a common body-stuff which bound men together. They were made of one clay and drew their nurture from one soil. Their individuality was guaranteed by the spirit which God had given to each, and this made their individuality responsible to God, however much they might feel bound to the community.

For this reason *'adam* is essentially a collective noun meaning mankind, or men in general, and it is seldom used of an individual. For the same reason there is no corresponding feminine, nor is there a plural. For the phrase *ben 'adam* see Vol. XXV p. 137. The extent to which *'adam* stresses humanness may be seen in the fact that *'ish* (see below) can be used of God or angelic beings, e.g., Ex. 15:3, Dan. 9:21, Zech. 1:8, but never *'adam*; here it is always 'like' or 'the likeness of', etc., e.g., Ezek. 1:5, 26, Dan. 10:16.

We next have a group of three words that belong together, although their exact interrelation and origin are still disputed, viz.,

'ish, plu. *'anashim* (three times *'ishim*) = man
'enosh (no plural) = man or mankind
'ishshah, plu. *nashim* = woman.

In the past it has been usual to derive these words from two or even three different roots, but fundamentally this seems improbable. Koehler tends with some hesitation to one root; if he is

wrong, we may be certain that here is a case where the original etymology had long since died out in popular consciousness. Indeed there is no certainty as regards the meaning of the root *'nsh*. There is no reason to connect it with the meaning 'to be weak', though this has become traditional in many circles. There is no justification here for appealing to the Biblilcal concept of man, since we are dealing with words widely used in the West Semitic languages. A meaning 'become familiar with' derived from the Arabic seems intrinsically unlikely. We should bear in mind that it is just in these commonest of all words that we may expect to find the etymology obscure or undiscoverable.

Young in his *Analytical Concordance* has unfortunately followed the once widely held view that *'anashim*, the plural of *'ish*, is really the plural of *'enosh* and has hence lumped them together. This makes it very difficult to discover from his usually so valuable work the real meaning of *'enosh*. As already remarked above it has no plural. Of the 42 times it is used 13 are found in the Psalms and 18 in Job. In the vast majority of cases it is either used in parallelism to *'adam* or *ben 'adam* (sing. or plu.), or with a meaning indistinguishable from that of *'adam*. The alleged connotation of insignificance and mortality seems to be an accident due to the fact that it is used mainly in Job and Psalms, books in which *'adam* is also very frequently used with such connotations.

'ish is a man in his individuality—in his strength or maleness it is *geber* or *zakar*, see below. It is consequently far and away the most used word in this group, occurring 2,166 times. As with 'man' in English, it is frequently used of an individual, when no stress is being laid on the sex, e.g., 1 Sam. 2:25. The word has a number of special uses or connotations.

'ish is the ordinary word for a husband. The three cases of *'enosh* given by Young are erroneous, for it is a question of *'anashim*, which, as we have seen, is the plural of *'ish*. In Ex. 4:25 f we should follow the RV in rendering bridegroom and not husband. In Jer. 3:20 both the AV and RV have translated falsely; it should be 'Surely as a wife deals treacherously on account of her friend', i.e., lover. So the only other word we have left for husband is *ba'al*, which really means owner. At least in Ex. 21:22,

Dt. 22:22; 24:4, Est. 1:17, 20 this nuance obviously lies behind the use of the word, while in 2 Sam. 11:26 husband is first *'ish* and then *ba'al*, the use of the latter in the second mention clearly indicating the purely formal nature of Bath-sheba's mourning. Hos. 2:16 shows that *ba'al* was considered much more formal and less intimate than *'ish*.

In its full sense the *'ish* was the man who has full social status and so stood out in all his individuality; hence the word can be used in contrast with *'adam* = men lost in the ruck. In Ps. 49:2 low = *bene 'adam*, high = *bene 'ish*; the same usage is found in Ps. 62:9, and in Is. 2:9; 5:15 *'adam* and *'ish* are used in the same contrast. In Isa. 31:8, however, the R.V is probably correct as against the AV, the two terms are probably used in mere poetic parallelism with no thought of a distinction between them. We may be certain that *'ish* is often used with the nuance of a man of rank or importance, though we are unable to decide in many cases. One of the more important examples is Isa. 53:3, where we should almost certainly understand 'rejected of men (of rank)'.

It need hardly be pointed out that *'ish* is repeatedly used of a master in contrast to his slave or servant.

'ish is often used idiomatically to mean each or every one, and in the same way *'ishshah* for the feminine.

Even as *'ishshah* is intimately linked with *'ish* (Gen. 2:23) so its meanings are parallels of those given above. It means woman in the same way as the other means man; in her femaleness she is *neqebah*. It means wife as the other means husband; there is no parallel to *ba'al*, the correct translation of Gen. 20:3 being 'owned by a husband (lit. owner).'

geber is derived from the verb *gabar* to be strong, to prevail. So it is used of man in his strength and hence in contrast to the woman. At the same time in poetry and the type of utterances we have in Proverbs it is often no more than a synonym for *'ish*, or even *'adam*.

In this connection it will be well to consider *gibbor* as well. It is strictly an adjective and is then almost always translated 'mighty'. It is generally used as a noun in which case it is almost invariably translated 'mighty man'. Though the re d ing is
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etymologically correct, it is clear that it fails to draw out the underlying meanings of the word. In Gen. 6:4 it obviously refers to those figures of the past whom we today only dimly see through the veil of legend; I.C.C. rightly renders 'heroes'. It has obviously a different nuance when it refers to Nimrod (Gen. 10:8); 'tyrant' may be a little too free, but it certainly brings out the underlying meaning. When the word is used of God—Dt. 10:17, Ps. 24:8, Isa. 9:6; 10:21; 42:13, Jer. 20:11 etc.—it probably always stresses His ability to fight the battles of His people, and RSV renders Jer. 20:11 well by 'But the Lord is with me as a dread warrior'. I prefer the rendering 'Hero God' in Isa. 9:6 for this reason. In contexts like 2 Sam. 1:21, 25 'hero' will normally be the better rendering. In the passages dealing with David's mighty men, 2 Sam. 10:7 (render 'all the host and the mighty men'), 2 Sam. 20:7; 23:8, 1 Kings 1:8, etc., we should at least use capital letters. They were a crack body of men. Moffatt translates 'veterans' except in 2 Sam. 23 and 1 Ch. 11 where he has 'knights'. I think him wrong in understanding the phrase in two different senses, but if we overlook the somewhat anachronistic flavouring of knights, it does bring out the true meaning.

Apart from *gebirah* and *geberet* which mean mistress and technically queen-mother, the root *gabar* is not used for women, nor is there any feminine word corresponding to it.

zakar and *neqebah*, both noun and adjective, mean respectively male and female, and may be applied equally to human beings and to animals. They are normally translated literally; the few exceptions, though perhaps a pity, hardly affect our understanding of the passages, except perhaps in Jer. 31. 22. Jerome understood 'A woman shall compass a man' to be a prophecy of the Virgin Birth, and the interpretation is still met from time to time. Even supposing that compass (=surround) could be understood in this way, which is hardly credible, the use of *neqebah* indicates that the meaning is quite other. The prophet is speaking of a mere female. The RSV 'A woman protects a man' is near its true meaning.

('Next issue: 'Man in Society')