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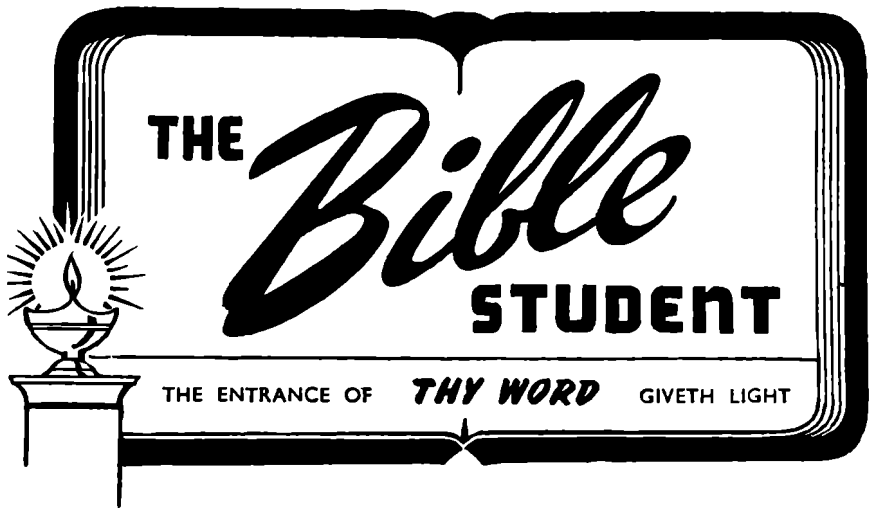
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# BIBLICAL HEBREW WORDS

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## Words of Relationship

The difficulties involved in translating the records of an age long past into the speech of today are strikingly illustrated by the word 'family'. It is true that even today the meaning of this word is capable of widening or contracting according to the context, but normally and increasingly it is used of husband, wife and children, or father, mother, brothers and sisters. The word normally translated 'family' in the Old Testament never bears this restricted meaning, while the phrase nearest it in meaning is seldom so translated.

The fundamental unit in Israel was the tribe—*matteh* or *shebet*. The two words are used approximately equally (183: 145) and have nearly the same meaning, the former being a staff and the latter a ruler's staff, or sceptre. In each case the meaning of tribe was secondary, the connection being presumably of the tribe as a natural unit of rule and administration. In Israel this normally derived from a consciousness of common origin, but this was not necessarily the case. The tribe of Judah took up into it Kenite and Kenizzite elements, while Manasseh will probably have absorbed many Canaanites, not as individuals but as city units.

As Josh. 7:14 shows us, the main subdivision of the tribe was the *mishpachah*. In A.V., R.V., R.S.V. this is normally, and from the standpoint of modern English probably always erroneously translated 'family'. Probably the nearest equivalent we have is 'clan', and this is the translation normally used by Moffatt. It was the largest group in which oneness through common origin was vitally felt. So the rendering 'kindred' on nine occasions is much nearer the true meaning. It should be noted, though, that it is less a technical word than the recognition of a fact. It is therefore useless to ask how many *mishpachot* there would be in a tribe; the number might well change with changing circumstances.

In Jud. 13:2; 18:11 we see its meaning enlarged to embrace a whole tribe. It is not likely that it is so used of Dan because it was a small tribe; in Jud. 18:19 *mishpachah* and *shebet* seem to be used as equivalents, and in the context stress on the smallness of Dan is excluded. In Jer. 2:4; 31:1 Israel is looked on as a confederation of *mishpachot*, and it is not likely that any other meaning than tribes is implied. Since the tribe claimed a common origin,

it was clearly entitled to be called in its totality a *mishpachah*. The same reason justifies the widening of the scope of the word in Amos 3:2 to cover the whole of Israel, and a similar usage is found with reference to foreign nations not merely in the same verse but also in passages like Gen. 10:5; 12:3, Jer. 10:25. Rather different is the usage in Mic. 2:3, Jer. 8:3; here common character rather than common origin is thought of.

Smaller than the *mishpachah* is the *'elep*, 'which means those intimate with each other, the community of those who belong together' (Pedersen: *Israel* 1-11, p. 50). It is identical in form with 'thousand'; the two words may be from different roots, or the numeral may be a derivative in sense. As a result they have been confounded in A.V., the approximate meaning of *'elep* as a tribe division having been recognized only in Jud. 6:15. It should be recognized in Num. 10:36, Josh. 22:14, 21, 30 (R.V. mg, R.S.V.), 1 Sam. 23:23 (R.V. mg), Mic. 5:2 (R.V. mg, R.S.V.), and quite possibly in some other passages as well. It would be of the greatest importance in our interpretation of the numbers involved in the exodus, if it were possible to prove Flinders Petrie's claim that *'elep* is also so used in the census lists of Num. 1 and 26.<sup>1</sup> R.S.V. tends to translate 'clan' in these contexts, while Moffatt tends to the little used 'sept'. The use of *'elep* implied not merely common origin but also a common area of living. Hence when the main subdivision in the militia is called 'a thousand' the stress is not only on its approximate number, but also on the fact that those in it will have come from the same town or district.

The smallest social nucleus is the *bet'ab*, the father's house, a phrase which is also found in the form of 'the house of David', etc. Three times A.V. translates *bayit* (house) by 'family' and not infrequently by 'household'; this latter translation is often justified, but in every case the question should be asked whether 'family' would not suit the context better. R.S.V. is much better; an example of its improvement may be seen in its rendering of 'family' for 'father's house . . . father's household' in Jud. 6:15 and 27. But it could have gone further; in verses like Gen. 28:21; 38:11 a little thought should show that 'family' is the real meaning, rather than 'house'.

Though the *bet'ab* is the Old Testament equivalent of our 'family', the correspondence is not exact. In the first place it

<sup>1</sup> See his *Egypt and Israel*, p. 42-46, or *Palestine and Israel*, p. 42 ff.

included all, slaves or others, who were dependant on the head of the family. Perhaps the most striking evidence of this is in Gen. 15:2 f. Abraham takes it for granted that if he has no children, his faithful slave becomes his heir. Somewhat similar is 1 Chr. 2:34 ff. and Prov. 17:2. Then it was clearly wider than the modern conception in that all the descendants of a living man were regarded as his family. For us Achan would have been regarded as head of his family (Josh. 7:24), but as his grandfather Zabdi (Josh. 7:1, 17) was still alive, he was looked on as being a member of his family. This tendency finds its strongest expression, when some exceptional man wins a peculiar position for himself; all his descendants, if they share even potentially in his privileges, belong to his family or house. The two most obvious examples are 'the house of Aaron' and 'the house of David'. There should be nothing surprising in all this, for it is well known that in the Old Testament it is the solidarity of the community rather than the importance of the individual that is stressed.

While in the vast majority of cases '*ab*', 'father', means exactly what it does in English, some of its uses go beyond the normal meanings of father. Since the head of the family was called 'father', though he might well be a grandfather or great-grandfather, the word '*ab*' may equally mean them, or even the original founder of the family or tribe. A quite natural extension of the use was to use it for the founder of a town. This is fairly common in the genealogies in 1 Chr. A few examples are Ashur the father of Tekoa (2:24), Shobal the father of Kirjath-jearim (2:50, cf. v. 52), see also 4:4. So too it can be used for the first settler or ruler of a district, e.g., Machir the father of Gilead (2:23). Quite analogous is its use for the founder of a trade or skill, e.g., Gen. 4:20, 21. Since the father is the ruler and protector of his family, so the name is given as a title of respect to those that protect the weak, e.g., Job 29:16, Is. 22:21, and so especially of God, e.g., Ps. 68:5. Since all members of the family owed respect to the father, the name can become a general title of respect, very often to an older man, but by no means necessarily so; some examples are 1 Sam. 24:11, 2 Kings 2:12; 6:21, Jud. 17:10; 18:19. Finally it is used in a few passages for the creator of something, e.g., Job 38:28, Is. 9:6, where the literal translation is 'Father of eternity'.

The uses of '*em*', 'mother', are for the most part parallel to those of '*ab*'. It can mean 'grandmother' (1 King 15:10, cf. v. 2) and

'ancestress' (Ez. 16:3). So the title is quite naturally applied to Israel (Hos. 2:2, 5; 4:5) and to Judah (Is. 50:1). The exact force of *'em* in Jud. 5:7 is not quite clear; it may well mean 'ruler', for the *shopet* (cf. Jud. 4:4) was not merely a judge in the legal sense, but also, and indeed primarily a ruler; on the other hand it may refer to Deborah's loving care for Israel. Similarly there is an element of doubt in 2 Sam. 20:19, though the most probable is that given by Kennedy (Century Bible *ad loc.*) 'An important and venerable city with its dependant villages, which in the Hebrew idiom were called its "daughters".'

It will be obvious from the above that *ben* (son) and *bat* (daughter, plu. *banot*) include the meanings of grandson, granddaughter, descendant. Equally obvious is their use as titles of address to younger persons, e.g., 1 Sam. 3:6; 26:17, Prov. 1:8, Ruth 3:10, Ps. 45:10, and to express the younger men and women generally, e.g., Ct. 2:2, 3. So also is their use to express the male and female members of a nation, tribe, city etc., e.g., Gen. 27:46, Ne. 12:23; 13:16, Jdg. 21:21, Ps. 137:7; 149:2, Is. 3:16; 16:2, Ez. 23:15, 17, Jl. 4:6 (in all cases 'children' are literally 'sons'). A little less obvious is the use of 'daughter' as a collective to represent the total population of a city, though in certain cases it may rather be a personification of the city itself. On the whole it is probably wiser not to assume a personification, for the origin of this use is really the picture of the city itself as the mother. Here are a few of the many examples, Ps. 45:12; 137:8; Is. 1:8; 37:22, Jer. 48:18; 50:42, Mic. 1:13; 4:8. Reference to a concordance will show that *betulah* (virgin) is sometimes linked with this idiom, without obviously adding to the picture; it is likely then that in Jer. 18:13; 31:4, 21, Amos 5:2 we have a mere variant of this idiom. A little thought will show that neither purity or impregnability can be implied in this use of *betulah* with or without *bat*.

The use of *bat*, indicated above in connection with 2 Sam. 20:19, for dependant villages (in about three quarters of the examples the English versions render 'towns', but such a translation is both untrue to archaeological evidence and to modern usage), hardly means that the villages had been founded or peopled from the city on which they depended. Archaeological evidence points rather the other way. It rather stresses their dependance.

**CORRECTION:** In Mr. Ellison's article in October issue, p. 171, line 20, *translation* should read—compound.