

WORD STUDY: MEDITATE

Posted on April 21, 2022 by Seth Herrington

MEDITATE

7 "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. **8** Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. **9** Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." --
Joshua 1:7-9

Look closely at verse 8. Amid the charges to be strong and courageous, there are simple instructions: *keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; **meditate** on it day and night...*

It's a soft call, but seems to provide the bedrock of strength and courage God commands of Joshua, where these verses appear, and to us today. So as [we study the language of scripture together](#), let's start with the word **meditate**.

Usage:

Meditate is used 23 times throughout scripture, and all but one are in the Old Testament. But remember, when we say it's used 23 times throughout scripture, what that really means is this:

*There are 23 times in the English Bible (I'm using the ESV translation) when translators decided the word **meditate** was the best way to translate a word from the original language.*

Of those 23 times, there are a variety of words in the original language that are translated as *meditate*. Meaning, there is more than one word in ancient Hebrew that can translate into English as *meditate*. Furthermore, Hebrew words that are translated as *meditate* are sometimes translated as other words in English! This might seem a little abstract, so let's look at a few verses that use one of the most common Hebrew words typically translated as *meditate*.

Example: הגה

This Hebrew word is usually translated as meditate, but also as ponder, moan, utter, mourn, mutter, sound, tell, talk, and a few others. It seems to have a contemplative and internal connotation.

Think about the words used to translate this Hebrew word like ingredients to a good soup - when they marinate together, they make הגה

Here are a few verses where the word appears (see **bold**).

Joshua 1:8 - This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall **meditate** on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Proverbs 15:28 - The heart of the righteous **ponders** how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

Job 27:4 - my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not **utter** deceit.

Now, look at these verses again, but let's replace the word translators with the Hebrew word...

Joshua 1:8 - This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall **הגה** on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Proverbs 15:28 - The heart of the righteous **הגה** how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.

Job 27:4 - my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not **הגה** deceit.

How might your own interpretation of the verses above deepen by thinking about the language used by the original authors? In Proverbs 15:28, my definition of the word *ponder* doesn't really do justice to what the original authors sought to communicate. Knowing it's the same Hebrew word used in Joshua 1:8 and Job 27:4 is pretty humbling. What about you?

Application:

What on earth does all this mean? It's deep but inviting - and worthy of some serious, ahem, meditation. If you're inclined to take a dive into the language pool, you might consider the following questions:

- Why does language matter when studying the Bible?
- Why are different words for *meditate* used in scripture? Why are different words for **הגה** used in scripture?
- What differences does the original language reflect between what ancient authors considered *meditation* and what we, in our cultural context, consider *meditation*? Why does that matter?
- What could cultural context have to do with any of the examples above?

Final thoughts:

As you consider these things, be ready for a real journey. Excited? Great! A little

confused? This is also ok. God honors our pursuit of Him with greater understanding. Talk with a friend, a small group, or someone else in the UE community.