

A BIBLICAL STUDY ON FEAR

LESSON THREE: FEAR IN THE BIBLE

by Sandy Harber

The English word "fear" appears 402 times in the King James Bible. It is translated from 29 different Hebrew (22) and Greek (7) words. By adding in an additional 8 words with "fear" as the root we pick up another 123 references, for a total of 523. These words are: feared, fearest, feareth, fearful, fearfully, fearfulness, fearing, and fears. These additions give us another 8 Hebrew (5) and Greek (3) words for a total of 37 different "fear" words. These 37 words give us a variety of fear-related nuances, such as concern, worry, timidity, fright, dread, terror, and awe (to name a few).

In addition, some of the Hebrew words reflect physical aspects of fear. For example, "chuw" or "chiyl" means "to twist or whirl (in a circular or spiral manner)." It's used to describe writhing in pain, grief, or fear. It reminds me of the twisting and churning in my stomach before I have to make a public speech. How many times have you felt that knot in your stomach when you faced something fearful?

"Chath" means "to prostrate" or "break down." Think of the Bible characters that fell down when they beheld an angel. Several Hebrew words mean "to shudder," "to tremble," "to quiver," or "to quake." These terms imply an unpleasant commotion or restlessness that produces a physical reaction. Remember the reaction of King Belshazzar when disembodied fingers wrote a message on the wall? "Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed and his knees smote one against another" (Dan. 5:6). The king was so terrified his knees were knocking together.

The Bible clearly distinguishes between what we should and should not fear (Matthew 10:28). Prolonged and uncontrolled fear can destroy our health. Stress is a type of fear and stress has sent many people to the Emergency Room with chest pains and/or high blood pressure. God did not intend for His children to live with this kind of fear.

The word "fear" is found in 52 books of the Bible. Add in the 8 fear-based words and we pick up 3 more books for a total of 55 out of 66 Bible books. Considering there are more than 500 references to fear specifically and many more if we expand our search to include synonyms, such as "afraid," "dread," "terror," "tremble," "worry", etc., we can conclude that God expects us to pay attention to this subject.

In studying the verses on fear, I found that the things that the people feared as documented in Scripture are the same things that we fear today. The list includes physical injury, death, judgment, punishment for sin, adversity, calamity, etc. Another prevalent theme is fear of what people will do individually or as a group. This list includes intimidation, retribution, confrontation, persecution, murder, war, etc. What are the things that you fear? Is that fear taking a toll on your health? I will be sharing some verses that I found helpful in my own struggle against fear as well as verses that stood out to me as I studied this subject. Meanwhile, get into God's Word yourself. Don't forget to ask for His guidance.

"O fear the Lord, ye his saints; for there is no want to them that fear him." Psalm 34:9