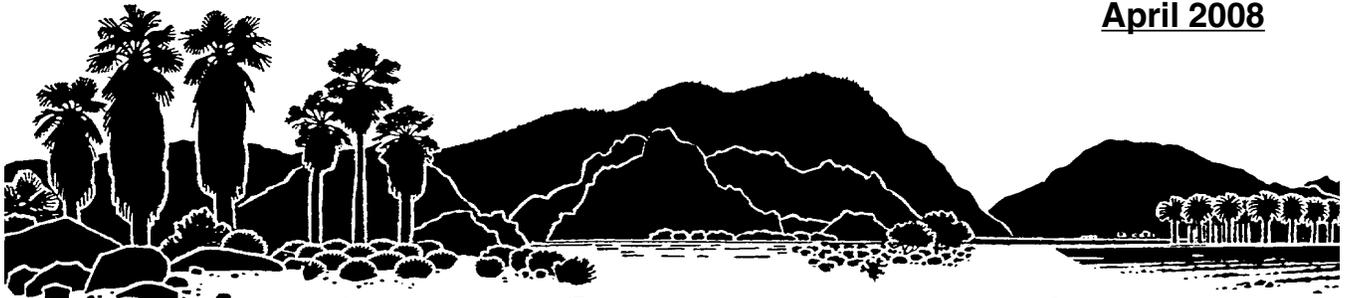


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WORDS!

By Ralph Woodrow

I find words intriguing. Were I to be stranded on a desert island, for reading material I would want a Bible, of course. But even a dictionary would be interesting and valuable—to study words and their definitions.

We have all heard the saying that one picture is worth a thousand words. That is often true—but *not always*. Sometimes *words* are more effective. It would be difficult with a *picture* to convey the message contained in the eleven *words*: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”!

Words have the power to help or hurt. A pleasant, encouraging word to someone can make their day; a negative, discouraging word can do the reverse.

Our own lives can be impacted by our words. One person wakes up in the morning and says, “Good morning, Lord!” Another wakes up and says, “O Lord, its morning.”

“By your *words* you will be justified, and by your *words* you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:37).

It would be good for all of us to pray the prayer of Psalms 19:14: “Let the *words* of my mouth, and the medication of my heart, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.”

Words are simply a combination of letters that convey meanings. They can be simple or complex, vulgar or victorious, minor or important—extending all the way up to Him who is, himself, THE WORD, Jesus Christ (John 1:1; Rev. 19:13).

Some interesting oddities about words:

What are the only two English words that end in the letters *gry*? “Angry” and “hungry”!

“Stewardesses” is the longest word typed with only the left hand, and “lollipop” is the longest on the right.

A sentence that has the same letters forward or backward is called a *palindrome*, like: “Madam, in Eden, I’m Adam.”

In Yreka, California, on West Miner Street, a bakery has long been in business. *Yreka Bakery* has the same letters forward or backward!

Words like my father’s name, *Otto*, also *racecar*, *kayak*, and *level* are all examples of words spelled the same forward or backward.

Perhaps stranger still, there is a word—when all its letters are capitalized—that is not only the same forward or backward, but *upside down*: NOON.

Those who have seen the comedy movie, “My Great Big Fat Greek Wedding” (2002), may recall that the father of the bride, proud of his Greek heritage, repeatedly mentions how various English words “come from the GREEK.” And, of course, this is true. Even our English word *alphabet* is formed from the first two letters of the Greek alphabet—*alpha* and *beta*. All of this is of special interest to Christians in that our New Testament is translated from Greek.

Using *Strong’s Concordance*, over the years I have gleaned the following *biblical* examples of Greek words that provide a basis for English words:

The word translated “numbered” in Matthew 10:30, “The very hairs of your head are all *numbered*,” is **arithmeo**—to count (Strong’s, 705). From this we obtain our word *arithmetic*!

The word translated “time” in Galatians 4:4, “...when the fullness of the *time* had come,” is **chronos** (Strong’s, 5550). From this we obtain words like *chronic*—lasting a long time; *chronological*—in order of time; *chronicle*—an account of events in order of time; and *synchronize*—to coincide in time.

The word translated “powerful” in Hebrews 4:12, “The word of God is...*powerful*,” is **energes** (Strong’s, 1756). From this we obtain our word *energy*!

The word translated “power” in Acts 1:8, “You shall receive *power* after the Holy Spirit has come upon you,” is **dunamis**—force, miraculous power (Strong’s, 1411). From this we obtain our word *dynamite*!

The word translated “healing” in Revelation 22:2, “...the leaves of the tree were for the *healing* of the nations,” is **therapeia** (Strong’s, 2322). From this we obtain our word *therapy*!

The word translated “hearing” in Acts 25:21, “Paul appealed...unto the *hearing* of Augustus,” is **diagnosis**—examination (Strong’s, 1233). From this we obtain our word *diagnosis*.

The word translated “warmed” in Mark 14:54, “Peter...warmed himself at the fire,” is **thermaino**—to heat (Strong’s, 2328). From this we obtain words like *thermostat* and *thermos*.

The word translated “lion” in Revelation 5:5, “...the *Lion* of the tribe of Judah,” is **leon** (Strong’s, 3023). From this we obtain our word *lion*. For what it’s worth: Leon spelled backwards is Noel.

The word translated “gnat” in Matthew 23:24, “...strain out a *gnat* and swallow a camel,” is **konops**—a mosquito (Strong’s, 2971). From this we obtain the word *canopy*. Initially a canopy was a net placed over a bed to protect from *mosquitoes*!

The word translated “sorcery” in Acts 8:9, “There was a certain man who...used sorcery,” is **mageuo** (Strong’s, 3096). From this we obtain our word *magic*.

The word translated “people” in Acts 19:30, “Paul would have entered in unto the *people*,” is **demos** (Strong’s, 1218). From this we obtain our word *democracy*, government by the people.

The word translated “peace” in Galatians 5:22, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, *peace*,” is **eirene** (Strong’s, 1515). From this we obtain our word *Irene*, a woman’s name.

The word translated “follow” in 3 John 11, “*Follow* not that which is evil,” is **mimeomai**—to imitate (Strong’s, 3401). From this we obtain our words *mimic* and even *mimeograph*!

The word translated “reasonable” in Romans 12:1, “...your *reasonable* service,” is **logikos** (Strong’s, 3050). From this we obtain our word *logical*.

The word translated “ignorant” in Acts 4:13, “...unlearned and *ignorant* men,” is **idiotes** (Strong’s, 2399). From this we obtain our word *idiot*.

The word translated “mad” in Acts 26:24, “...much learning has made you *mad*,” is **mania**—craziness (Strong’s, 3130). From this we obtain our words *mania* and *maniac*.

The word translated “martyr” in Revelation 2:13, “Antipas was my faithful *martyr*,” is **martus** (Strong’s, 3144). From this we obtain our word *martyr*.

The word translated “sound” in Acts 2:2, “...a *sound* from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind,” is **echos**—a loud noise (Strong’s, 2279). From this we obtain our word *echo*!

The word translated “voice” in Acts 2:14, “Peter...lifted up his *voice*,” is **phone** (Strong’s, 5456). From this we obtain words like *phone*, *telephone*, *microphone*, and *phonograph*!

The word translated “theater” in Acts 19:29, “...they rushed with one accord into the theater,” is **theatron**—a place for public show (Strong’s, 2302). From this we obtain our word *theater*.

The word translated “troubled” in Luke 10:41, “...*troubled* about many things,” is **turbazo**—disturbed (Strong’s, 5182). From this we obtain our word *turbulence*!

The word translated “overthrow” in 2 Peter 2:6, “...turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes...with an *overthrow*,” is **katastrophe** (Strong’s, 2692). From this we obtain our word *catastrophe*.

In its original form, the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *beth*, was a crude drawing of a house. When coupled with other words, *beth* (which means “house”) provides the base for the names of places like Beth-lehem. Bethlehem means “House of bread.”

Incidentally, “Bethlehem” is the answer to the very *first* question asked in the New Testament: “Where is he that is born king of the Jews?”

Some other examples in which *beth* (house) appears:

Beth-abara, “Ferry-house” (John 1:28).

Beth-anath, “House of replies” (Judges 1:33).

Beth-any, “House of poverty” (Aramaic, John 11:1).

Beth-arabah, “House of the desert” (Josh. 15:6).

Beth-aven, “House of vanity” (Josh. 7:2).

Beth-esda, “House of kindness” (John 5:2).

Beth-phage, “House of unripe figs” (Matt. 21:1).

Beth-saida, “House of fishers” (John 1:44).

Beth-shan, “House of rest” (1 Sam. 31:10).

Beth-shemesh, “House of the sun” (2 Chron. 25:23).

Beth-zur, “House of rock” (2 Chron. 11:7).

Not to be overlooked is “Beth-el,” which means “House of God” (Gen. 28:19). After Jerusalem, Bethel appears *more times* in scripture than any other town or city.

Because the Bible is translated from Hebrew and Greek, some point out that it is good for Bible students to know at least a little Hebrew and Greek. One fellow said, “I know a little Hebrew and a little Greek—the little Hebrew owns a jewelry shop down the street, and the little Greek runs the fish market around the corner.”

Notice the way the words “Greek” and “Hebrew” were used in this paragraph. This is an example of *paronomasia*—when the same word is used in different senses, a play on words. Or, a “play on words” may use words that are similar in sound, but with some type of contrasting meaning.

Sometimes with my grandchildren, we have played little word games—like thinking up *names* that sound like other words:

Mrs. Sippie (Mississippi), Louise E. Anna (Louisiana), Minnie Sota (Minnesota), Al Falpha (alfalfa), Ray Deo (radio), Dick Tate (dictate), Otto Mattic (automatic)—names like that.

Or how about the couple that owned a little mom-and-pop store—their last name was Corn, so they were Mom Corn and Pop Corn!

More seriously, in both the Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek, the biblical writers sometimes used word play to intensify their points, even though the exact equivalent cannot carry over into an English translation:

In Isaiah 5:7, we read: “He looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.” In English, the play on words goes unnoticed. But in Hebrew, it is obvious: “He looked for *mishpat* [judgment], but behold *mishpach* [oppression]; for *tsedakah* [righteousness], but behold *tseakah* [a cry].”

In Jeremiah 1:11,12, we read: “I see a rod of an almond tree. Then said the Lord unto me, You have well seen: for I will

hasten my word to perform it.” Because the almond tree blossoms early and can bear fruit by the time other trees are only beginning to bud, it was called a *hastening tree*. And so, in Hebrew, there is a play on words: “I see a *shagged* [almond tree]...I will *shagad* [hasten] my word to perform it.”

In his translation of the Bible, James Moffatt, recognizing the vivid word play in Micah 1:10-14, made this attempt to express it in English:

“Weep *tears* at Teartown (Bochim),
grovel in the *dust* at Dustown (Bethophrah),
...Stirtown (Zaanán) dare not *stir*
...for doom descends from the Eternal
to the very gates of Jerusalem.
To *horse* and drive away, O Horsetown (Lakhish)
...Israel’s kings are ever *balked*
at Balkton (Achzib).”

In the language Jesus spoke—Aramaic—apparently the words for “gnat” and “camel” were *galma* and *gamla*. If so, he used a play on words when he spoke about “straining out a *galma* [gnat] and swallowing a *gamla* [camel]” (Matt. 23:24).

In Greek, the name “Peter” is *Petros*, and “rock” is *petra*. So—regardless of how the passage is interpreted—a play on words is apparent: “I tell you that you are *Petros* [Peter], and on this *petra* [rock] I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). Even today, in English, wood that has turned to rock is called *petrified* wood.

Paul used a play on words concerning the runaway slave Onesimus. The name Onesimus means *profitable*. Writing to Philemon, Paul said: “I beseech you for my son *Onesimus* [profitable], whom I have begotten in my bonds: which in time past was to you *unprofitable* [the opposite of what his name meant], but now *profitable* [what his name meant] to you and to me” (Philemon 10,11).

There are some fine one-liners that are especially catchy because of a play on words:

Seven days without prayer makes one *weak*.
A lot of *kneeling* will keep you in good *standing*.
Exercise daily—*walk* with the Lord.
Give God what’s *right*; not what’s *left*!
Give Satan an *inch* and he’ll be a *ruler*.
God prefers the *fruit* of the spirit over religious *nuts*.
Having *truth decay*? Brush up on your Bible.
Nothing ruins the truth like *stretching* it.

I am told that in some foreign languages, just a tone or emphasis on one word in a sentence can change the meaning. This is also true in English.

When my grandson Alex was about 10 years old, one day I said to him: “Did you know I was named after Abraham Lincoln?” He thought a while about that, and then smiled. “Yes, and *I* was named AFTER Bill Clinton!” (Bill Clinton was president at the time.) In a sentence like this, two meanings are possible, based on how the word “after” is emphasized.

Or consider the words of a preacher who had just finished eating a big meal: “I’m a FULL gospel preacher!”

Sometimes a word is *pronounced* the same as another word, though it is spelled differently and conveys a different meaning. This can be illustrated by the words of a sign in a Palm Springs shoe repair shop:

I CAN *HEEL* YOU,
OR EVEN SAVE YOUR *SOLE*.
I WILL EVEN *DYE* FOR YOU.

A pastor announced there would be a board meeting after the morning service. A man showed up who was not a member of the board. When the pastor explained to him this was a meeting only of the board, he replied he was as *bored* as anyone else in the church!

In 1978, I was a speaker at Glen Eyrie, the beautiful Navigators’ Conference grounds in Colorado Springs, Colorado. One afternoon I hiked up the trail to the hilltop burial site of Dawson Trotman, founder of The Navigators, who died to save the life of a drowning girl.

On the way up, I passed the wife of one of the other speakers, who was coming down the trail. She told me, “When you get up there, you can see the planes”—at least that’s what I *thought* she said. I knew the large Air Force Academy was not far away. From the hilltop, I assumed, I would see many planes parked along the landing strip. But upon reaching the top, I saw no *planes*. I did notice the *plains*—extending eastward as far as the eye could see. It then dawned on me—she was talking about *plains*, not planes!

It becomes even more complex when a word is pronounced the *same* and spelled the *same*—but can have an OPPOSITE meaning!

“Cleave” can mean *cling together*, as when Jesus said a man was to leave father and mother and *cleave* to his wife (Matt. 19:5). Or, it can mean *split apart* (Psalms 141:7; Zech. 14:4). A butcher splits meat apart with a cleaver.

“Buckle” can mean to *hold together*, as when you buckle a belt; or it can mean *fall apart*, to buckle under pressure!

“Trim” can mean to *add* something, as to trim a Christmas tree; or it can mean to *take away* something, as to trim hair.

“Clip” can mean to *attach*, as when we attach two sheets of paper together with a paper clip; or it can mean to *remove*, as when hair is *cut* off!

“Cut,” itself, can mean *get in*, as to cut in line; or it can mean to *get out*, as when one cuts a class at school.

“Root” can mean to *establish*, as when a seed takes root; or it can mean to *remove entirely*, to root out!

“Dust” can mean *remove* dust, as in dusting the furniture; or it can mean *apply* dust, as in dusting for fingerprints.

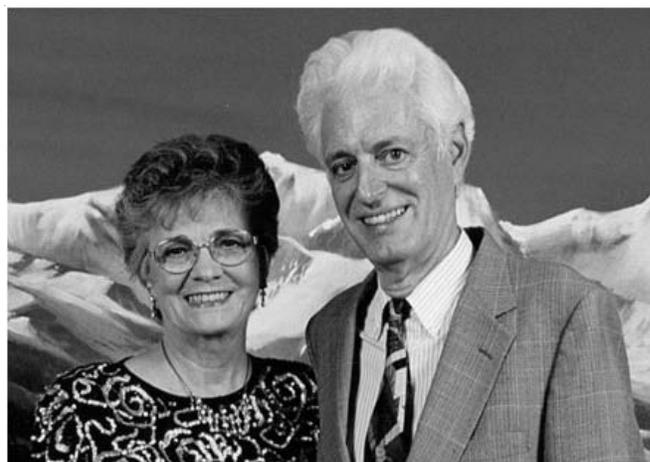
“Reservations” can be what one makes when he plans to go somewhere; or it can mean one is not sure if he wants to go—he has *reservations* about it!

“Up” and “down” are opposites, yet if a house burns *up*, or burns *down*, it is destroyed either way!

Probably all languages have some idiosyncrasies. Here are some in English:

There is no egg in the eggplant.
There is no ham in hamburger.
Pineapple is neither a pine nor apple.
Grapefruit is not a grape
Grape-nuts cereal contains neither grapes nor nuts.
Poison ivy is not an ivy.
Poison oak is not an oak.
A guinea pig is not from Guinea nor is it a pig.
English muffins were not invented in England.
French fries were not invented in France.
German chocolate has nothing to do with Germany.
Quicksand takes one down slowly, not *quickly*.
Boxing rings are *square*, not round.
Why do we *park* on driveways and *drive* on parkways?
Why do people *recite* at a play, yet play at a *recital*?
Why is an actor always *in* the movies, but *on* television?
We fill *in* a form by filling it *out*.
If I wind up my watch it *starts*, but when I wind up this sentence, it *stops*!

Despite the fact that some words can be misunderstood, *overall* they work very well. God uses words to convey the good news about his plan for man. "Heaven and earth shall pass away," Jesus said, "but my *words* shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35).
—Ralph Woodrow



Ralph and Arlene Woodrow (Photo taken in Alaska)

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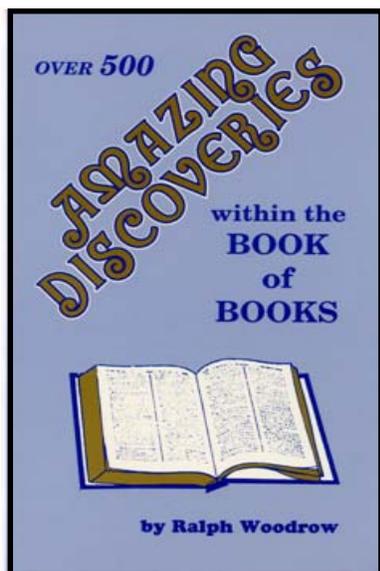
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