



Righteousness

The Hebraic meaning of "Righteous"

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פְּסוּחַ צְדִיקָה *tsadiyq*

The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous, and his ears toward their cry. (Psalm 34:15 RSV)

Who are the righteous and what is righteousness? As our verse above indicates, God sees and listens to the righteous so it would be in our best interest to have a biblical definition of righteousness. Every Hebrew word in the mind of the Ancient Hebrews paints a picture of action. By doing a little investigation this picture can be found.

The first step in finding a more concrete meaning to a word is to find it being used in that context. For example, the word בָּרַךְ (*barak*, Strong's #1288) is almost always translated as "bless," but being an abstract word we need to find it being used in a more concrete manner, which we do in Genesis 24:11, where it means "to kneel". This gives us a more concrete picture of the word. The problem with the word צְדִיקָה (*tsadiyq*, Strong's #6662) is that it is never used in a concrete manner.

The next method is to compare its use in Hebrew poetry where words are commonly paralleled with similar meaning words, such as in the following passage.

Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart! (Psalm 32:11 RSV)

The Hebrew words *tsadiyq*, translated as righteous, and יָשָׁר (*yashar*, Strong's #3477), translated as upright, are paralleled many times in the Bible indicating that in the Hebrew mind they were similar in meaning. Upright is another abstract word but it is used in a concrete manner, such as in Jeremiah 31:9, where it means "straight" as in a straight path.

Hebrew Poetry will also parallel antonyms, words of opposite meaning, such as in the following verse.

For the arms of the wicked shall be broken; but the LORD upholds the righteous. (Psalm 37:17 RSV)

Here we find the word wicked (*rasha*, **Strong's #7563**) being used as an antonym, here as well as in many other passages, to the word righteous (*tsadiyq*). While the word wicked is an abstract, we can find its concrete meaning in the verb form, רשע (R.Sh.Ah, **Strong's #7561**), which means to "depart" in the sense of leaving God's way.

For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. (Psalm 18:21 RSV)

We now have a few clues into the meaning of a *tsadiyq*. He is one who is straight and does not depart from the way of God. The next step is to understand these concepts from the Ancient Hebraic **culture** and **thought**.

The Ancient Hebrews were a **nomadic people** who traveled a circuit through the wilderness, following the same paths from pasture to pasture, campsite to campsite and watering hole to watering hole. Anyone leaving this path can become lost and wander aimlessly, one who has "departed" from the path.

A righteous person is not one who lives a religiously pious life, the common interpretation of this word, he **is one who follows the correct path, the path (way) of God.**