

HEBREW WORD STUDY – EVIL – RA רע Resh Ayin

Isaiah 5:20: “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”

Yep, that is where that verse is found alright. I am sure if you didn't know where it was found you have been looking for it. So here it is Isaiah 5:20. Few pastors in American have not preached on this passage in the past few months. In the midst of an election year, riots, righteous indignation, and flagrant hypocrisy how could you not preach a sermon on Isaiah 5:20? How could I not do a study on this verse?



So, I am going to through my hat in the ring and wave my flag in some overt fashion. I wasn't going to do a study on this verse but I live in Chicago which has and is seeing it's share of riots, violence, and destruction. I have resisted adding my voice to this verse but I heard something on the local news today that was just too good (I mean good in the sense of good sermon material) to pass up. One of the rioters was interviewed on local news and justified their looting, violence, and destruction by saying people have a right to eat and since the government was not feeding them they were going to take what they could to eat. They were after all the oppressed and they had a right to destroy and commit acts of violence against those who oppressed them. Besides, the insurance companies will pay for all the damage (as a former insurance investigator I know that is not true).

What a wonderful example of calling evil good. And substituting darkness for light. These are the same people who burn Bibles as well as our flag and they feel they are on high

moral grounds and should be called heroes for ridding the evils, as they define evil, in this world.

Let's just pause here and let our indignation settle down a little and examine this verse. We all know what evil is, it is bad the opposite of good. We Christians would never commit evil we are good. We have God's word to back us up on that. But people who burn God's Words, how do they determine what is evil and good? Well, it says in Judges 17:6 that everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Now that is as good a definition of chaos that I have ever read. It is right because I say it is right and who are you to argue. The only way to argue is to show someone Scripture, but of course, they are burning that.

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I will get the word woe a little later but first, let's examine this word evil. It is the word *ra* in Hebrew. Hebrew words are supposed to be three letters minimum, but here we have a word that is only two letters, Resh Ayin. It is a loan word from the Middle Egyptian which is only two letters and just happens to be the name of Egypt's chief God – Ra. The general rule of thumb to get the third letter is to just repeat the last letter. That makes the Hebrew root *ra'a*. There are about ten words in Hebrew that begin with Resh Ayin and each has a different ending letter. The root word could be one of ten possible Hebrew words. For instance, the third letter could be a Beth for *ra'av* which is an evil of hunger and starvation. That third letter could be a Daleth for *ra'ad* which is an evil that causes you to lose control. *Ra'al* is an evil of drunkenness and causing confusion. *Ra'am* is an evil of rage and anger and so forth. All the *ra* words express some form of evil. Which one is the evil of Isaiah 5:20? Well following the traditional rule of thumb it would be *ra'a* which is an evil paying homage to another god.

Chaim Bentorah has his own personal view on these ra words. I believe God intended for all the evils that are listed to be included in this word which is why we do not have the third letter. Ultimately it is *ra'a* which is worshipping another god. Generally, that other god is oneself. This results in believing that what is right is anything you believe is right. After all, you are your own god and you get to set your own standards.

Note that this is opposite to the word *tov* which we render as good but actually means to be in harmony with something or someone. Plain and simple, anything that is not in harmony with God is evil.

Yesterday I did a study on Psalms 139:23: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts:" David realized that something was wrong in his relationship with God. He knew it wasn't God's fault but he could not put his finger on what was wrong so he asked God to audit his heart and instruct him in what was wrong. Sometimes we are just as guilty of evil as those radicals. No, not to their degree, but often we set our own standards which may not be God's standards. How often do we decide what is good and what is evil without going to the Bible, it just seems right in our own eyes?

Yes, we need to take a stand against evil in this day. Evil is unmasked, there is no denying the evil that is out there, it is blatant. But before we take our stand, we need to study Scripture and have a Scriptural basis for what is evil. Otherwise, we are no different than that radical who says that busting a window and helping yourself to the loot to feed your family is good. Why, because he says so and he does not believe in a God who sets a standard. We, however, believe in a God who sets a standard and we must fully understand his standard and not make up our own. God will defend His standards and those who break them have a woe against them. The word woe in Hebrew is *hoy* which is an interjection that is onomatopoeic. That is a word whose meaning is found in its pronunciation. Like bang for a gunshot or boom for an explosion. Woe for a cry of grief or pain.

Woe to those who call evil good? That is God crying out in pain and heartbreak and before long those calling evil good will also be crying out in pain and heartbreak.

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