



WORDS!

By Ralph Woodrow

I find words intriguing. If I were 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 the words we speak. One person wakes up in the morning and says victoriously, “Good morning, Lord!” Another wakes up and complains, “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...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 two English words that end in the letters *gry*? “Angry” and “hungry”!

Why is “abbreviated” such a long word?

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

“God” spelled backwards is *dog*.

“Stressed” spelled backwards is *desserts*.

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

In the town of Yreka, California, for 100 years there was a bakery called the *Yreka Bakery*. The letters are the same forward or backward!

Words like my father’s name, *Otto*, also *racecar*, *kayak*, and *level* are all palindromes.

But the most involved palindrome I am aware of, is a list of people who sinned! (cf. Rom. 3:23). It seems almost impossible, but the letters in this paragraph are the same forward or backward.

Dennis, Nell, Edna, Leon, Nedra, Anita, Rolf, Nora, Alice, Carol, Leo, Jane, Reed, Dena, Dale, Basil, Rae, Penny, Lana, Dave, Denny, Lena, Ida, Bernadette, Ben, Ray, Lila, Nina, Jo, Ira, Mara, Sara, Mario, Jan, Ina, Lily, Arne, Bette, Dan, Reba, Diane, Lynn, Ed, Eva, Dana, Lynne, Pearl, Isabel, Ada, Ned, Dee, Rena, Joel, Lora, Cecil, Aaron, Flora, Tina, Arden, Noel, and Ellen sinned.

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

If we want to emphasize certain words today, we can use CAPS, **bold**, underline, or *italics*. But when the books of the Bible were written, to emphasize a word, it was DOUBLED (known technically as *epizeuxis*). Over the past few years, I have compiled a list of doubles from Scripture:

Abraham, Abraham; Amen, Amen; Babylon is fallen, is fallen; cast up, cast up; comfort, comfort; Crucify him, crucify him; Eloi, Eloi; go through, go through; Here I am, here I am; Jacob, Jacob; Jerusalem, Jerusalem; Lord, Lord; Martha, Martha; Master, master; Mene, Mene; Moses, Moses, My God, my God; peace, peace; Rabi, Rabi; Saul, Saul; Simon, Simon; the living, the living; Verily, verily; watchman what of the night, watchman what of the night.

Ha ha and **Ho ho** (Job 39:25; Zech. 2:6) are doubles in the King James Version.

Sometimes, not only double words were used by biblical writers, but **triples!** Holy, holy, holy; the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD; O earth, earth, earth; overthrow, overthrow, overthrow; Woe, woe, woe.

Studies indicate that most readers focus mainly on the first and last letters of words. Consequently, words can be understood—even when the other letters are rearranged!

I cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulaclty uesdnatnrd waht I was rdanieg. The phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan mind! Aoccdnrig to rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mttaer in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit plcae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Amzanig huh?

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 mentioned 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 we use today:

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



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 “numbered” in Matthew 10:30, “The very hairs of your head are all *numbered*,” is **arithmeō**—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 “power” in Acts 1:8, “You shall receive *power* after the Holy Spirit has come upon you,” is **dynamis** (Strong's, 1411). From this we obtain our word *dynamite*!



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

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 **diagnōsis**—examination (Strong's, 1233). From this we obtain our word *diagnosis*.

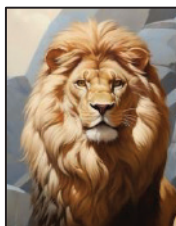


The word translated “warmed” in Mark 14:54, “Peter...*warmed* himself at the fire,” is **thermaino**—to heat (Strong's, 2328). From this we obtain words like *thermostat* and *thermometer*.

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 “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 “lion” in Revelation 5:5, “...the *Lion* of the tribe of Judah,” is **leon** (Strong's, 3023). From this we obtain our word *lion*. Leon (spelled backwards) is *Noel*, commonly linked with the birth of Christ.



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

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 “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 *mimicograph*!

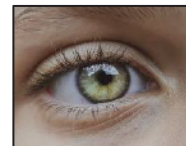
The word translated “reasonable” in Romans 12:1, “...your *reasonable* service,” is **logikos** (Strong's, 3050). From this we obtain our word *logical*.

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



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*!

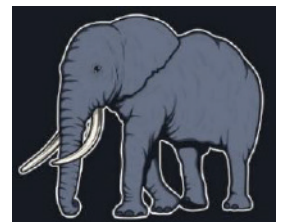
The word translated “overthrow” in 2 Peter 2:6, “...turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes...with an *overthrow*,” is **katastrophe** (Strong's, 2692). From this we obtain our word *catastrophe*.



The word translated “eye” in Matt. 5:38, “an *eye* for an *eye*,” is **ophthalmos** (Strong's, 3788). From this we obtain *ophthalmologist*, a medical doctor who treats eye diseases and prescribes eyeglasses.

The word translated “fatherless” in James 1:27, “Pure religion...to visit the *fatherless*...in their affliction,” is **orphanos** (Strong's, 3737). From this we obtain our word *orphan*.

The word translated “ivory” in Revelation 18:2, “...vessels of *ivory*,” is **elephantinos** (Strong's, 1661). From this we obtain our word *elephant*, the source for ivory.



The word translated “triumph” in 2 Cor. 2:14, “God...causes us to *triumph* in Christ,” is **thriambeuō** (Strong's, 2358). From this we obtain our words *triumph* and *triumphant*.

The word translated “hymn” in Matt. 26:30, “when they had sung a *hymn*...,” is **hymneō** (Strong's, 5214). From this we obtain our word *hymn*.

The word translated “letters” in John 7:15, “How does this man know *letters*, having never studied?,” is **gramma** (Strong's, 1121). From this we obtain our word *grammar*.

The word translated “school” in Acts 19:9, “the *school* of Tyrannus,” is **scholē** (Strong's, 4981). From this we obtain our word *school*.

In its original form, *beth*, the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, 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-abara, “Ferry-house” (John 1:28). Beth-anath; “House of replies” (Judges 1:33); Beth-any, “House of poverty” (John 11:1); Beth-arabah, “House of the desert” (Josh. 15:6); Beth-aven, “House of vanity” (Josh. 7:2); Beth-el, “House of God” (Gen. 28:19); 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); and the best-known, the birthplace of Jesus: Beth-lehem (“House of bread”).

Because the Bible is translated from Hebrew and Greek, it can be helpful to know 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.”

This is known as a **play on words**, a literary form when words have a double meaning. It can be used to reinforce a point or for humorous effect.

A preacher who had just finished eating a big meal declared: “I’m a FULL gospel preacher!”

A couple with the last name Corn owned a little mom-and-pop store. 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. It cannot carry over into an English translation, but Isaiah 5:7 is an example: “He looked for **mishpat** [judgment], but behold **mishpach** [oppression]; for **tsedakah** [righteousness], but behold **tseakah** [a cry].”

In the language Jesus spoke—Aramaic—apparently the words for “gnat” and “camel” were *galma* and *gamla*. This would indicate 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.

Here are some one-liners that are especially catchy because of word play:

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.

The best vitamin for a believer is *BI*.

Need an ark to save animals? I *Noah* guy.

Atheism is a *non-prophet* organization.

Words that are pronounced the same, but are spelled *different*, are called *homophones*. This can be illustrated by a sign in a Palm Springs shoe repair shop:

I CAN HEEL YOU,
OR EVEN SAVE YOU 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 while trying 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 airport of the 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!

Words that are pronounced the same as *numbers*: **1**, won; **2**, to, too; **4**, for, fore; **8**, ate. Words that are pronounced the same as *letters* of the alphabet: **A**, aye; **B**, be, bee; **C**, sea, see; **I**, eye; **J**, jay; **O**, oh, owe; **P**, pea; **Q**, cue, queue; **R**, are; **T**, tea; **U**, you; **X**, ex; **Y**, why.

Enclosed in the box below is an awareness test. First read the sentence. Now count the **F**’s in the sentence. Count them only once; do not go back and count them again.

FINISHED FILES ARE THE RESULT OF YEARS OF SCIENTIFIC STUDY COMBINED WITH THE EXPERIENCE OF MANY YEARS.

There are six F’s. However, because the F in “of” sounds like a V, it seems to disappear, and most will count only three F’s in the sentence.

“Whoever reads, let him *understand*” (Matt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14). In our study of the Scriptures, we sometimes miss things because we do not read *carefully*. Sometimes just **one** letter can give a word a totally different meaning.

It is not uncommon for readers (and speakers) to mistakenly add an “r” in Mark 16:1—women “**brought**” spices to the tomb of Jesus. But what it actually says is they “**BOUGHT**” spices (which they *later* brought to the tomb).

In a book I wrote years ago, I quoted a Church Father who said in the resurrection “the saints will be raised to a glorious immortality.” But unfortunately, in the typesetting, a “t” was left out, giving it a totally different meaning! No one seemed to catch it, until a woman in Japan (I believe stationed there on a military assignment) wrote to me: “I think you mean **immortality**, not **immorality**!”

The difference of one letter can turn BITTER into BETTER!

By adding one letter to the word God, we have **good**. By adding one letter to evil we have **Devil**.

The letters GODISNOWHERE, could say “God is nowhere” or “God is now here,” depending on spacing.

Sometimes words—even though pronounced the same and spelled the same—can have OPPOSITE meanings!

“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* (Psa. 141:7; Zech. 14:4). A butcher splits meat apart with a *cleaver*.

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

“Trim” can mean *add* something, as to trim a Christmas tree; or it can mean *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 *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 school class.

“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 planning to go somewhere; or it can mean one is not sure if he wants to go—he has *reservations* about it!

The house burns “down” and the house burns “up.” Either way the house is destroyed.

If I *wind up* my watch it **starts**, but when I *wind up* this sentence, it **stops**!

There are well-known words, easily understood, but which are (technically) *misnomers*:

French fries were not invented in *France*. German chocolate has nothing to do with *Germany*. English muffins were not invented in *England*. 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*. Quicksand takes one down slowly, not *quickly*. Boxing rings are *square*, not round.



Sometimes answers can be *wrong*, even though they are (technically) *correct*:

Name the two days of the week that begin with the letter T.
Today and Tomorrow.

A teenage boy was asked in a class which month has 28 days. He answered: “**All of them**”!

How can you drop an egg onto a concrete floor without cracking it? Any way you want, **concrete floors are very hard to crack.**

A school teacher asked Johnny, “Can you name the Great Lakes?” Johnny replied: “I don't need to; **they've already been named.**”

As one studies the way words are formed (etymology), the root meanings of some are obvious. A taxi charges a *tax*. A window is an opening for *wind*. A plantation is a place where things are *planted*. News is that which is *new*. One who detects is called a *detective*. The word “undertaker” is pretty clear.

But other times there are **words within words** that have *no* bearing on the actual meaning.

One day while stopped at a traffic light, the vehicle in front of me was a Toyota *Tacoma*. I have long been familiar with the city of Tacoma, Washington, having spoken at a church there a number of times. But I had never noticed the word TACO in Tacoma before!



We may not notice “owl” in the word *owl*; “bat” in *bathtub*; “boar” in *cupboard*; “ox” in *box*; “rat” in *crate*; “lice” in *police*; “ink” in *sink*; or “cement” in *announcement*; etc.

So, it is a fact: words can be used in a wide variety of ways. But, overall, they work very well.

God uses words to convey the good news about His plan for man. Jesus said:

“The **WORDS** that I speak to you are SPIRIT, and they are LIFE....heaven and earth shall pass away, but my **WORDS** shall not pass away” (John 6:63; Matt. 24:35). —RW

Additional copies of this article on WORDS may be obtained free upon request.



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