

METRO ATLANTA SEMINARY – NORTH CAMPUS
HEBREW FOR BIBLE STUDY
IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENT: THE MEANING OF WORDS (AGAIN)

Goals:

This assignment is designed to:

- Familiarize the student with using Logos to search for words in the Hebrew text
- Further develop the student's ability to accurately describe the biblical text
- Introducing the student to questions of evaluating interpretive decisions others have made

Content:

Read Exodus 4:1-5. In verse 4, God commands Moses to “catch” the serpent by the tail (so ESV). Looking at the Hebrew text, we see that this verb is a Qal Imperative from the root אָחַז. In the second half of the verse, Moses' action is described using a Hiphil from the root חָזַק. This difference is obscured in the ESV, because it says “he put out his hand and *caught* it.” Ought there be a difference between these two words and, if so, how should that distinction be made?

Look now at Ryken's commentary on Exodus:

The original Hebrew gives a hint how tentatively Moses reached for [the snake]. When God told him to take the serpent by the tail, he used a word that means “take hold of” something firmly. But when the Bible describes what Moses actually did, it uses the word that means “to snatch at” or “to grab cautiously.”¹

Now Ryken, because he cares for his reader, has provided a footnote to this point, which cites John Durham's commentary, who notes the following:

Moses certainly considered the staff-become-serpent menacing, since he fled from it. Indeed, the narrator has delightfully suggested Moses' fear by his use of verbs in v 4: Yahweh tells Moses to “take hold of” the snake's tail with his hand, a hold which leaves him almost completely vulnerable to the snakes fangs. Moses, with understandable apprehension, does what most of us would do under such circumstances: instead of “taking hold of” the serpent's tail, he “snatched at it,” “grabbed it cautiously,” and no doubt with gritting teeth.²

He provides further notes in his translation:

4.a. The verb is qal of אָחַז "take hold of, grasp, take possession of" (cf. 2 Sam 6:6 in reference to Uzzah “catching” the unsteady ark, or 1 Kgs 6:6 and 10, in reference to timbers “catching hold,” that is, being supported by a wall.

4.b. The verb is hiphil of חָזַק "seize violently, snatch, grab cautiously" (cf. 1 Sam 17:35, in reference to David grabbing a bear or a lion “by his whiskers” [probably = “his

1 Phillip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, Preaching the Word, ESV Edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 97-98.

2 John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1987), 44-45.

bottom jaw”], or Deut 2:25, in reference to an attacker seizing a young woman.”³

Is Durham correct in his analysis? Can more data be brought to bear on the problem?

Due Date: Tuesday, 9/25/17, In class.

3 Durham, *Exodus*, 42.