

The Flattening Lexicon

Hebrew is a language of concrete action and relationship. Greek philosophy and Latin law are languages of abstraction and category. Every time a Hebrew word passed through that pipeline, motion became mental state, relationship became transaction, and a way of walking became a system of belief. This lexicon names the damage, word by word. Four kinds of damage, and a short list of survivors.

DAMAGE TYPE ONE

The Imports.

English words with no Hebrew original behind them at all. The word itself was carried in from outside and set on top of the text.

Hell

She'ol · Gehinnom · Hades · Tartaroo

A Norse word (*Hel*, goddess of the underworld) that swallowed four different things: *She'ol*, the grave where everyone goes; *Gehinnom*, a literal valley south of Jerusalem; Greek *Hades*; and one appearance of *Tartaroo* from Greek myth (2 Peter 2:4). Four concepts, one pagan word, plus medieval torture imagery none of the originals carry.

Church

qahal ·edah → ekklesia

"Church" comes from *kuriakon*, "lord's house," a building word. The Greek *ekklesia* means the called-out assembly, standing for the Hebrew *qahal*. Tyndale translated it "congregation." The KJV translators were ordered by rule to print "church." A people became an address, by decree.

Testament

berit

Latin *testamentum* is a will, a document executed at death. *Berit* is a covenant, cut in blood between living parties. The two-volume "Old and New Testament" spine of your Bible is built on this substitution.

Lucifer

helel ben shachar

Isaiah 14:12 taunts the king of Babylon as "shining one, son of dawn." Jerome rendered it with the Latin for morning star, *lucifer*. The common noun got capitalized, and an entire satanic biography was built on a translation artifact.

Religion

(no Hebrew word exists)

The Tanakh has no word for religion. Scripture knows covenant, walk, way, instruction. "Religion" as a compartment of life separate from the rest of life is itself the import.

Paradise

pardes

A Persian loanword meaning orchard, a royal park you walk in. It became a synonym for a disembodied afterlife destination, which it never was.

Baptism

tevilah · mikvah

Transliterating Greek *baptizo* instead of translating it ("immerse") hid the fact that immersion was an existing, ongoing Jewish practice. A new ritual appeared to come from nowhere.

Angel

malakh

Malakh means messenger, human or heavenly, same word for both. It is a job description. "Angel" imports a winged species.

Demon

shedim (twice in the Tanakh)

The elaborate demonology is largely Greek (*daimon*) and intertestamental import; the Hebrew Scriptures barely have the category.

DAMAGE TYPE TWO

The Flattenings.

One English word crushing several distinct Hebrew words, until distinctions the text draws on every page become invisible.

Praise

halal · yadah · zamar · barak · todah · shabach · tehillah

Seven or more distinct physical actions: raving, extending hands, making music, kneeling, thanksgiving, shouting, sung praise. One vague churchword covers them all, and you cannot do "praise" without knowing which one.

Sin

chata · avon · pesha

Three diagnoses: missing the way, twistedness, and willful rebellion. Psalm 51 uses all three deliberately. English prints one moralized smear over all of them, and the reader loses the anatomy.

Love

ahavah · chesed · racham · dod

The chief casualty is *chesed*, covenant loyalty, roughly 250 occurrences, the spine of the Tanakh. "Lovingkindness" was Coverdale's heroic attempt to save it.

Mercy / Grace

chesed · chen · rachamim

Loyalty, favor, and womb-deep compassion (*rachamim*, from *rechem*, womb) became interchangeable theological tokens.

Fear

yir'ah · pachad

The text never confuses awe (*yir'ah*) with dread (*pachad*). English prints "fear" for both, so the fear of the LORD reads as terror when it is the awe that bends the knee.

Word

davar · Memra

Davar means word AND thing, matter, event; Hebrew speech acts. And the Aramaic *Memra*, the manifest Word of the targums standing behind John 1, vanishes from English entirely.

Fool

naval · kesil · letz · pethi

Proverbs is a taxonomy of four fools: the moral fool, the dull fool, the scoffer, the naive. Four diagnoses, four fates, one English word.

World

eretz · tevel · olam

"End of the world" is usually end of the *age* (*olam*, Greek *aion*). Whole eschatologies ride on this one flattening, and *eretz* is often not the globe but the Land.

Forever / Eternal

olam · ad · netzach

Olam is horizon language, duration beyond sight, an age. "Eternal" imports Greek timelessness, a category the Hebrew text does not use.

Jew

yehudi → *Ioudaios*, which still said "Judean"

This one is English-layer damage: the Greek preserved the regional sense. English "Jew" now runs five conversations at once: the covenant, the people, the bloodline, the land, and a modern government. The deadliest case is the crucifixion. When John writes that "the Ioudaioi" pressed for the execution, the Greek says JUDEANS: the Jerusalem power bloc, the chief-priestly establishment and its council, one sect in one province. Yeshua's followers were Jews. The crowds singing Hosanna days earlier were Jews. The women at the cross were Jews. "The Jews killed Jesus" reads a Judean faction's verdict as a people's guilt, and centuries of blood followed that one flattened word.

Law (in the New Testament)

Torah → *nomos* → "law" — a two-stage flattening

Greek began it: *nomos* (norm, custom, statute) already dropped Torah's sense of fatherly instruction, and Paul's *nomos* carries four referents: the Torah itself, the priestly code (the "change of law" in Hebrews 7:12 is the priesthood's regulation), "works of law" boundary-keeping, and law as principle ("the law of sin," "the law of faith"). English finished it, stamping courtroom "law" over all four, so readers hear one thing abolished when four different things are under discussion. Half of "Paul against the law" stands on this flattening.

DAMAGE TYPE THREE

The Inversions.

The worst kind: renderings that point the opposite direction from the Hebrew underneath them.

Obey

shama — to hear

Hebrew has no separate word for obey. To truly hear IS to respond. "Shema Yisrael" is not "comply, Israel." The relationship moved from listening to submission-to-command in one translation choice.

Sacrifice

korban — from *karav*, to draw near

English "sacrifice" means loss, giving something up. *Korban* means approach: the thing that brings you near. The entire offering system flipped from gift-of-nearness to payment-of-loss.

Repent

teshuvah · *shuv* — to turn, return

Latin *poenitere* made it about feeling sorry. Hebrew repentance is motion, not emotion: turn around and come home. Greek *metanoia*, change of mind, is already one step abstracted from the road.

Heart

lev — the seat of thinking and will

English heart means emotions. Hebrew *lev* thinks, plans, decides ("as a man thinks in his lev"). Emotions live lower, in the kidneys and the gut. Every "heart" verse in your Bible is about the mind and the will.

Law

Torah — from *yarah*, to aim, to point, to instruct

A father's instruction and an archer's aim became courtroom legislation (*nomos* → *lex* → law). The single most consequential flattening in the Book. Every "works of the law" debate rides on it.

Faith / Believe

emunah — from *aman*, firmness

Faithfulness, steadiness, trust you can lean your weight on. It became mental assent to propositions. The righteous live by *emunah* (Habakkuk 2:4): by steadfastness, not by opinion.

Prayer

tefillah — from *palal*; *hitpallel* is reflexive

English "pray" (Latin *precari*) means to beg. The Hebrew verb is reflexive: to examine and judge yourself before God. Self-alignment, not petition-begging. The direction of the verb flipped.

Perfect

tamim — whole, complete, sound

"Be perfect" reads as flawlessness and crushes people. *Tamim* (and Greek *teleios*) mean whole, mature, undivided. Noah was *tamim*. He was not sinless.

Know

yada — intimate, experiential knowing

"Adam knew his wife." "You only have I known" (Amos 3:2). Covenantal union became information storage.

Holy

kadosh — set apart, distinct

A sharp positional word, separated FOR a purpose, became a vague religious glow. English "holy" is Germanic *whole/hale*, and the fog came with it.

Glory

kavod — weight, heaviness, substance

The most substantial word in the vocabulary became shine and fame. God's *kavod* is His weight in the room, not His glow.

Remember

zakhar — to act on behalf of

God "remembering" Noah or Channah is not recall; He never forgot. It is memory as deed: moving into action for someone. Data became devotion's opposite.

DAMAGE TYPE FOUR

The Names.

What happened to the names themselves, starting with the Name.

The LORD

YHWH — the Name, 6,800+ occurrences

The covenant Name replaced by a title, via the Greek *kurios* convention. The single largest substitution in the entire text.

God

Elohim · *El* · *Eloah* · *El Shaddai* · *El Elyon*

A generic Germanic word (*gott*) flattens a family of distinct titles, each carrying its own weight.

Jesus

Yeshua — "YHWH saves"

One letter from *yeshuah*, salvation. "You shall call his name Yeshua, for he will save his people" is a Hebrew pun that works in no other language. The name WAS the announcement, and the announcement got latinized out.

Christ

Mashiach — the Anointed King

A royal Hebrew title became, functionally, a surname. "Jesus Christ" reads as first and last name instead of "Yeshua the Anointed King."

Satan

ha-satan — THE adversary, the accuser

A courtroom role, with the definite article, became a proper name wearing a medieval costume. In the Tanakh there is no personified arch-devil: *ha-satan* is a function before God (Job 1–2), and even the angel of YHWH can stand as "a satan" in a man's path (Numbers 22:22). The single devil with a name and a biography is a later construction, stitched together from imports (see Lucifer).

The Holy Spirit

Ruach HaKodesh — the breath of His holiness

In the Tanakh, *ruach* is God's own breath and presence in action, never a separate someone. David prays "take not Your *ruach kodshecha*, the breath of Your holiness, from me" (Psalm 51:11; the phrase appears only there and in Isaiah 63:10–11). English capitalization turned a possessive into a proper name, and the councils turned the name into a person. The personification is a translation-and-creed artifact, not a Hebrew category. God's Spirit is God present, not a third party in the room.

The Jews (in John)

hoi Ioudaioi — the Judeans

Regional and leadership references flattened into an ethnic totality. Centuries of antisemitism drafted on the rendering.

Gentile

goyim — the nations

A plural word for peoples, filtered through Latin *gentilis*, became a binary identity category the Torah never drew.

HONEST WEIGHTS

The Survivors.

Words that crossed mostly intact, and the pattern they share: they were transliterated, not translated. The flattening happened wherever a Greek or Latin concept stood ready to substitute.

Amen

aman — firm, reliable

The root of *emunah*. Untranslated, and unharmed.

Hallelujah

halelu-Yah — praise Yah

Crossed every language on earth intact, Name and all.

Sabbath

shabbat — cease, rest

The word survived even where the day was moved.

Hosanna

hoshia-na — save now!

A plea from Psalm 118, carried whole into the Gospels.

The diagnosis in one sentence: the flattening was not one bad translation. It was a change of civilization at the level of vocabulary, and the way back is the same road in reverse: one word at a time, down to the Hebrew, and out into the walk.

© 2026 DeSoto Consulting LLC · The Berean Table · bereantable.com