

Word study of the week: What does mean to "keep"? 9-20-2012

*"And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates. And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to **keep** it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:" (Genesis 2:14 - 16)*

Keep - Why don't we take some time with this word and put it in its proper perspective? Going forward, it might have a significant change as to how we hear and obey God's word. Incidentally, in the Genesis account, this word is used 362 times in 354 verses listed under various Strong Concordance numbers.

Our focus is on the word keep as used in Genesis 2:15. It is listed under #8104, שָׁמַר, shamar. In the Blue Letter Bible Search, it means to keep, guard, observe, give heed, have charge of, keep what and ward, protect, save life, watchman (participle), observe, retain, treasure up (in memory), to keep (within bounds), and restrain.

However, Strong's Concordance more precisely defines keep as a primitive root; properly to hedge about (as with thorns), i.e., to guard; generally to protect, attend to, etc.: beware, be circumspect, take heed (to self) as well as watch (man). God made or fashioned man and then put the man in the garden with purpose assigned. The garden was supposed to be a place for man to rest, settle down and remain as long as he followed the command "to keep."

Adam committed a very transgression and they both paid a heavy price. This would no longer be a place for them "to rest, settle down and remain." God has an expectation that we guard, keep watch, and put a hedge about the garden but; we must also guard our flocks and our homes from the adversary's infiltration. So, we read in Genesis 3:24 that:

*"So he drove out the man; and he place at the east of the Garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to **keep** the way of the tree of life."*

So God did what He had to do. He drove out the man and woman to shamar or keep the tree of life, to “hedge about,” to guard and protect what man had failed to do.

The drove is a strong word and one that we will study at a later date. For now, let us take a closer look at the word shamar, spelled with three letters of the Hebrew alphabet, reading from right to left: resh ך, mem ך, and shin ך. The first two letters, the shin and mem are a two-letter root that has several meaning. Recall that one of Noah’s sons was name Shem whose name in Hebrew is, in fact, Shem, #8035/8036, which means name. For #8034, it is a primitive root from #7760 through the idea of definite and conspicuous position. It seems to imply an appellation, as a mark or memorial of individuality. Interesting, God placed Adam in the garden and gave him, in my opinion, a definite and conspicuous position. He was marked for that position.

Another important point to make about this two-letter root is the fact that the Hebrew word for both hear and obey is shama, #8085 and uses the same two-letter root.