

## HEBREW SECRETS? HIDDEN MEANINGS? DON'T BUY IT.

Here are some tell-tale signs that people who claim to have "special insight about Hebrew secrets" have no idea what they are talking about:

1. They treat Hebrew as a code to be deciphered, rather than as a language.

Ancient Hebrew was a language. People did not wonder about the mystical meanings of various letters when they were engaging in ordinary speech, making contracts, arguing, or trading with other people.

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, not because the language is inherently holy, but because that's what the people spoke! It is basically the language of Canaan, and anyone who knew Hebrew could talk with their Moabite neighbors who basically spoke a variant of the language (the difference between "Hebrew" and "Moabite" is the difference between how people speak in Iowa and Arkansas). When Moabite King Mesha had an inscription written, in which he brags about defeating Israel, he is not talking about Jesus when he exalts Chemosh over Yahweh and uses the aleph-tav in his inscription.

2. They assign mystical meanings to Hebrew letters.

The Hebrew alphabet is based on the Phoenician alphabet, and those letters are basically pictographs of ordinary objects. There is no spiritual significance to a house, door, throwing stick, camel, ox, or water.

3. They convert Hebrew letters to numbers and make mystical claims.

During Old Testament times, letters were not used to represent numbers. Instead, they wrote out words to represent numbers, just like we use "three", "two thousand", or "seventy". The practice of (think in terms of English) having A=1, B=2, C=3 (but w/Hebrew letters) did not begin until after the Old Testament was completed. While it is possible (but not certain) that some Jews engaged in mystical numerology around New Testament times, New Testament writers did not do so (and they did use a variety of ancient Jewish methods of Bible interpretation).

4. They cherry-pick Hebrew words (such as names) and string them together to make an English sentence which is supposed to have spiritual significance.

Even if it was legitimate to pick a word here or there and put it together (and it is not), Hebrew word order is quite different than English word order. If you have studied any human language other than English, you are aware of the differences between the order of one language and another. Biblical Hebrew likes to put verbs at the beginning of sentences, before the "whodunnit" (subject). We put the whodunnit before a verb. When people extract a bunch of Hebrew words, put them together in an English order, and then claim that God intended a particular meaning in the original Hebrew, the level of irrationality in which they are engaging and which they are promoting is difficult to quantify.

5. They cite Strong's Concordance as an authoritative Hebrew resource.

Strong's Concordance has a "dictionary" in the back which can give a little extra information about Hebrew and Greek words to the English speaker. However, it is not designed for someone who knows Hebrew, and it lacks the precision of a "real" Hebrew lexicon (that's a fancy word for "dictionary")--a precision which only someone trained in Hebrew can use.

6. They show you an interlinear and claim that certain words are not translated and therefore have a special meaning.

An "interlinear" is a text which has Hebrew or Greek words with English equivalents written below. Many people who use interlinears are unaware of the word order differences between Hebrew and English, and they also do not know or understand Hebrew syntax. (Syntax is the relationship between various words and the meanings which combinations have which might not be the same as what one would expect from individual words--context is quite important.)

Humans convey meaning by combinations of words, rather than by arbitrary definitions of individual words, and a context is needed to figure out what someone means.

For example, take the English words "put" and "up" or "down". "Put" implies placing something somewhere, and "up" is a direction which is the opposite of down. But "put up" can mean "tolerate" or "place somewhere above", depending upon other words. Thus "He put up with John's speech" means he tolerated John's speech, while "He put up a painting on a wall" means he hung a painting on a wall. "He put his cup down on the floor" (placed it on a low place) is different from "He gave John a put-down" (insulted John).

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