

Q: SHOULD WE REALLY “HATE” OUR FAMILIES?

PASTORS ARE BOUND FROM TIME TO TIME to get some difficult questions from wonderful people who are confused about how to understand a particular passage of Scripture.

I got a question from a lovely grandmother who audited my Old Testament Introduction class back in 1971, shortly after I joined the faculty. Mrs. Dora Brown was a devoted Christian lay leader and a very active Elder in a local

command “*st yrslf*,” which could mean “suit yourself” or “shoot yourself.”)

Spoken Hebrew had no ambiguity, but once the spoken word was written down—without vowels and with some letters used for two different sounds—ambiguities were instantaneous though unintentional, sometimes creating a garbled written record of perfectly clear oral statements.

sion of the Greek *misōō* in 14:26 to the Hebrew *snh* (= *shah-nah*) “to forsake.”

A second answer to Mrs. Brown’s question is that the Hebrew *snh* could also be the cognate of the Arabic *shana’a* “to give one his/her right or due,” or the cognate of the Arabic *sanaya* “to treat one with gentleness, to endeavor to conciliate one, and to please, content, or satisfy someone.” These two options draw support from the way Jesus treated his own mother. While on the cross, just

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Presbyterian church. She asked me about Luke 14:26: “If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

It seems this verse was being used by the youth pastor at her church to encourage young people to rebel against their parents and to hate their siblings and all other family members if they were truly to follow Jesus. Mrs. Brown wondered if Jesus really said those words, and if so how they could be reconciled with the litany of love found throughout Scripture—from Lev. 19:18, “love your neighbor,” to I John 4:21, “he who loves God should love his brother also.”?

Her question required me to do some homework, including a search for Greek textual variants of *misōō* (“to hate”) or other possible nuances of *misōō* that might appear in the Greek lexicons. But I found no relevant textual variants or lexical alternatives for *misōō*. Some commentators stated that Jesus actually said “he who does not hate,” but usually they concluded that Jesus did not mean literally what he said, and they then speculated about what Jesus must have meant.

Others argued mistakenly that the Greek *misōō* (again, “to hate”) reflects here the Semitic sense “to love less” and appealed to the Hebrew verb *šānē* (phonetic *sah-nay*), which, allegedly, had the sense “to leave aside, to abandon.” However, the Hebrew *šānē* (*sah-nay*) always meant “to hate,” never “to forsake, to abandon.” It was the Hebrew verb *šanā* (phonetic *shah-nah*) that meant “to leave aside, to abandon, to forsake.” Spoken Hebrew clearly distinguished between the sounds “s” and “sh”, but in written texts the same letter was used for the two different sounds. (An analogy in English—written in Hebrew style with consonants only and just one letter for both the “s” and “sh” sounds—is the

Here, then, was one answer to Mrs. Brown’s question. Speaking in Hebrew, Jesus said “If anyone comes to me and he does not forsake (= Hebrew *snh*) father, mother, . . . he cannot be my disciple.” In this case the s of the Hebrew *snh* stood for the sh sound (like the s in the English word “sure”), and the imperfect form of the verb would have been (in phonetic spelling) *ye-shan-neh* “he forsakes.” But, when Jesus’ words were later translated from a Hebrew text into Greek, the s of the Hebrew *snh* was misread as an “s” sound (like the “s” in the English word “sore”), and the imperfect form of that verb would have been pronounced (in phonetic spelling) as *yis-nah* “he hates.” In oral tradition there could have been no confusion of *lo-yis-nah*, “he does not hate” and *lo-ye-shan-neh* “he does not forsake” (the *lo* prefix of both verbs being the negative “not”).

Forsaking one’s own family for a new love has its roots in the creation story: “a man leaves/forsakes his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). The forsaking of *kith* and *kin* (i.e., saying “good-bye”) for a new love required no hate, just a separation due to new commitments and priorities. Jesus’ call for forsaking all in order to become a disciple appears unambiguously in Luke 14:33, “So therefore, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple,” and supports the retrover-

before he died, Jesus made provision for his mother’s welfare after his death:

“When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.” (John 19:26-27)

This obviously was not an act of hate on Jesus’ part. Nor was the beloved disciple, in obedience to Jesus’ alleged earlier command, “hate your mother,” likely to have started hating Mary once she became for him a “Mother.” To the contrary, Jesus and the beloved disciple were making it possible for Mary to receive what was her right and due.

Thanks to Mrs. Brown’s question, I started to look at similar problematic texts in the Gospels to see if Hebrew and its Semitic cognates could resolve other difficulties. The results of this endeavor over thirty-five years are now published online in two volumes, titled “Clarifying Baffling Biblical Passages” (chapters 26–33 deal with New Testament texts) and “Clarifying More Baffling Biblical Passages” (chapters 19–31 also deal with New Testament texts). Both volumes are free and available at <http://tmcdaniel.palmer-seminary.edu/iM>

(Chapter 31 of the first volume has an expanded and more technical text dealing with Luke 14:26-27 than the one presented here.)

