

## Think Hebrew

Because the Bible is a compilation of history, poetry, theology, and personal letters written by Jews (Luke is likely the exception - Col 4:11) to primarily Jewish audiences, a serious student of the Bible must understand the way Jews think and communicate. 1. Jews, or Hebrews as they are often called in the Old Testament, 2. people from the mid and far east, and 3. native Americans from both North and South America generally "think Eastern." 1. People from the Mediterranean countries, 2. Europe, and 3. the United States are considered "western thinkers." **Jesus was a Jew and taught with a distinctive Eastern approach.** Both approaches are interesting and valuable. Some contrasts between Western and Eastern thought are described below (information from Ray Vander Lann):

*Western or Greek thought* has been most significantly influenced by Greek philosophers like Plato; it is *abstract* and *logical* and is expressed with words, precise definitions, bullet points, and outlines ie God is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent.

*Eastern or Hebrew thinking* is often considered "oriental." It is *concrete* and expressed in word pictures and stories. It is experiential and emotional. ie God is my father, He is a Shepherd, He is living water and the bread of life.

***Westerners study the Bible to develop systematic theology. We want answers! Easterners study the text to increase their sense of awe for God. A Jewish Bible student is often elated over an antinomy, a conundrum, or an apparent contradiction in the text. "Isn't God awesome!" he exclaims.***

**For us "Greeks"** - the ultimate in truth is scientific truth; we prefer prose to poetry; to us numbers indicate amounts; our faith tends to be intellectual; as students we attempt *to know* what our teachers know. We Greeks are always trying to prove God. **We focus on the individual.** To us *sin* is wrong belief.

**For Hebrews** - the ultimate in truth is spiritual truth; they prefer poetry to prose; truth is developing; to them numbers are symbolic; their faith tends to be relational; as students they attempt *to become* who their teachers are; in Hebrew there is no word for *heretic*; to a Jew a heretic is not someone *who believes the wrong things* but one who *behaves in the wrong way*. The Hebrew thinker assumes the existence of God. **He is passionate about his community.** (Achan in the OT and Ananias and Sapphira in the NT threatened God's community.) To a Jew *sin* is wrong behavior.

**ie.**

Jews typically answer a profound question with another question; ie "what causes juvenile delinquency?"

A Greek would say something like "poor parenting."

A Jew might answer, "If a child's father eats onions and his mother chews on raw garlic, can you expect the child to have sweet smelling breath?"

**As we gentiles (goyim) develop our "Eastern thinking regarding the land, the culture, and Book," we can cooperate with God in moving our faith that magical 12 inches from our head to our heart.**

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An example of "Contextual" Bible Study from 1 Sam 17:4-7 NAS

4 Then a champion came out from the armies of the Philistines named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. 5 He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was clothed with scale-armor which weighed five (may have been six) thousand shekels of bronze. 6 He also had bronze greaves on his legs and a bronze javelin slung between his shoulders. 7 The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and the head of his spear weighed six hundred shekels of iron; his shield-carrier also walked before him.

We Greeks will likely be calculating the size of Goliath and his equipment;

A Jew will simply say, "Goliath was an evil, anti-God character with the scales of a snake."

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Mark 10:17-22 NIV

17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "**what must I do to inherit eternal life?**" 18 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good-except God alone. 19 **You know the commandments:** 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" 20 "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." 21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. "**One thing you lack,**" he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." 22 At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

***Eternal life is a Hebrew idiom describing a life lived in harmony with God.*** We get to Heaven through God's grace alone. Our grateful obedience to His law is simply a function of His grace transforming our lives. When our lives are lived in compliance to His gracious law, they are enhanced; when they are not, our lives are diminished.

