



Word Study -

Grace – Part 1

by Tim Kelley

This past Sabbath Angie and I had the opportunity to participate in an extended Bible study in Homer, Alaska. We discussed a number of topics throughout the afternoon and evening, but we seemed to keep coming back to the topic of God's *grace* toward his people. Grace is an important topic in Christian circles, and it should be. The word grace appears 170 times in the King James Bible, and over 75% of the time (131 times) it appears in the New Testament. Thus, it would seem logical to believe that *grace* is a New Testament concept.

Grace, though, is not exclusive to the New Testament, but is actually an Old Testament concept. With a little help from a concordance, one will find that the Hebrew words from which we get the words *grace*, *gracious*, and *graciously* appear more than 147 times in the Tnakh (the Old Testament) and other words, such as names that contain the root word for grace, appear even more than that. Therefore, one could conclude that the true meaning of grace could be found in the Tnakh. Unfortunately, most Christians see it as a Christian concept and thus ignore the Old Testament meaning.

In this study, we'll dig through many of the scriptures where this word, or its Hebrew counterpart, are used, attempt to come up with a definition of the word based on those scriptures, then in another study, see how our definition affects the understanding of many popular New Testament passages.

Before we start, it's helpful to see the definition from which many Christians get their understanding of *grace*. The Strong's Concordance defines *grace* as such:

5485 χάρις charis {khar'-ece}; graciousness (as gratifying), of manner or act (abstract or concrete; literal, figurative or spiritual; especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life; including gratitude):--acceptable, benefit, favour, gift, grace(-ious), joy, liberality, pleasure, thank(-s, -worthy).

Somewhat abstract, isn't it. What is "divine influence upon the heart"? Is that God moving (influencing) a person to do something? Many writers try to use this definition, but they almost always come up with more abstract thought. For instance, this writer likens grace to a gift –

*"In the Scriptures God's forgiveness is often directly associated with the word grace, which refers to undeserved favor that we receive from God. Grace is also closely related to the word gift. It usually refers to an unearned gift or favor, such as God's gifts of forgiveness and eternal life."*¹

The writer is correct, *grace* (charis) and *gift* (charisma) are closely related (in fact charisma is Strong's #5486), but if you were to examine the definitions, they define each other by referring to each other.

In a different article entitled "Defining Grace" from another web site, the writer makes this statement:

¹ <http://www.ucg.org/bible-study-lesson/bible-study-course-lesson-8-what-christian-conversion/gods-grace-and-forgiveness/>

*"Divine influence is the effect of God's dealings with mankind. His influence concerning grace is favorable, and when responded to in obedience, it results in the heart becoming delightfully calm and happy, pleasurable, cheerful, and well off (even when the circumstances remain unchanged). In contrast, when God's influence is His judgment for sin, we would not describe it as "favorable regard.""*²

In his article, the writer defines grace this way –

GRACE = The Divine influence upon the heart, the manner or act of favorable regard, resulting in the heart becoming delightfully calm and happy, pleasurable, cheerful, and well-off.³

Using this train of thought, how does a person know he's received grace? What would keep one person who is walking down one path to conclude that it was "divine influence upon his heart" that caused him to take that path while another person who took a totally opposite path to conclude the same thing? Could both Moses and Pharaoh claim to have had "divine influence on their hearts"? After all, God spoke to Moses, yet God "hardened" Pharaoh's heart.

What's more, how does this concept fit in this often quoted New Testament scripture . . . ?

^{KJV} Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith . . .

Is it the "divine influence on the heart" that saves you, or is it faith that saves you - - and if it's faith, does not faith, as James makes clear, require works? What a dilemma!

This is all very confusing to me. Fortunately (at least for me) this is all cleared up when I turn to the pages of the Old Testament. Keep in mind that at the time the Apostles penned their works, there was no New Testament - - only the Tanakh, the Old Testament. Thus, when people like Yeshua and Paul used terms such as *grace*, they did so with Old Testament "Hebraic" concepts in mind. Therefore, let's see what the Tanakh has to say about the word "grace".

The English word grace comes from the Hebrew word "chen" (**חֵן**)⁴. Strong's supplies a definition – "favour, grace, charm". Again, this definition is somewhat vague. A better definition can be derived by looking at the pictographic meaning of the individual Hebrew letters. The first letter is *chet* which means *fence*. A person erects a fence to protect his property. The second letter is *nun* which means *fish*. This letter is commonly associated with *life* since fish lay hundreds of eggs from which springs forth much *life*. Thus, combining the two Hebrew letters gives us a word that conveys the thought of *protecting life*.

Chen is closely related to the word *chanah* which is most often translated *tent* or *encampment*. We know that the purpose for a tent is to protect the persons, the lives, that are in it. This is also the purpose for an encampment. When people camp together they are much safer than when they camp by themselves. We can find this concept where grace equals protection in many stories of the Tanakh.

Let's look at the first place the word *chen* is used in the Bible. This is the story of the flood, when God destroyed all mankind except for one family –

² http://www.bibleanswerstand.org/nuggets_10.htm

³ Ibid.

⁴ Strong's 2580

Genesis 6:7-8 So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." ⁸ But Noah found **grace** (*chen*) in the eyes of the LORD.

God was going to destroy all mankind except for Noah and his family. Now consider this. Was Noah going to be saved from the flood because he had "divine influence upon his heart", or was it the divine protection that God was going to provide that saved him?

Another place we see protection associated with grace is when God physically removed Lot, his wife, and his daughters from Sodom.

Genesis 19:15-19 ¹⁵ When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city." ¹⁶ And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city . . . ¹⁸ Then Lot said to them, "Please, no, my lords! ¹⁹ "Indeed now, your servant has found **favor** (grace, *chen*) in your sight, and you have increased your mercy which you have shown me by saving my life . . .

Lot was having difficulty figuring out what to do as he saw the proverbial "hell breaking loose", so God protected him and his family by picking them up and placing them outside the city. This was not "divine influence upon his heart", but rather "divine influence upon his body"!

The thought of *protection* being associated with *grace* is also found in the Psalms.

NKJ Psalm 84:11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

God is our strength and shield. He will give protection and glory to those who walk in His righteousness.

Finally, Torah is shown to be a part of the grace = protection. In Proverbs, Solomon shows that Torah is protection, that when you keep your eyes focused on God's law, you walk will be safe and your sleep sound.

Proverbs 3:21-24 ²¹ My son, let them (Torah) not depart from your eyes -- Keep sound wisdom and discretion; ²² So they will be life to your soul And grace to your neck. ²³ Then you will walk safely in your way, And your foot will not stumble. ²⁴ When you lie down, you will not be afraid; Yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet.

The idea that God is the protector of His people is throughout the Tanakh. Passages like 2 Samuel 22:2 ("YHVH is my rock and my fortress . . ."), Psalm 91:2 ("YHVH is my refuge and my fortress . . ."), and Isaiah 40:10 ("the Lord God comes with might, and His arm rules for Him . . .") exemplify Israel's understanding of who God is, even if they themselves don't accept it.

We see from these examples that grace is protection of life and that YHVH is Israel's protector. But grace has another aspect that is closely related and that is the thought of being *avored*. When Jacob was returning to the land of Canaan and met his brother Esau on the way, he separated his children by their mothers, but kept Rachael – his favored wife – in the back. He protected her the most.

We are the same way. We love our children, and when we see them going down the wrong path, or getting ready to make a bad decision, we want to step in and protect them. We don't want them to get

hurt. Our children get this protection simply because they're our children. We don't often extend the same concern to our neighbor's children.

God favors those He loves, those who please Him, and those who join into covenant with Him. He watches out for them and helps to make their lives more comfortable. He often does this simply by building a hedge, a wall of protection, around them just as He did Job.

Abraham was a man who followed God. He left his home in Babylon and moved his family to Canaan simply because God told him to do so. One day YHVH came passing by on His way to Sodom. Abraham then made this request –

^{ESV} Genesis 18:3 And (Abraham)said, "O Lord, if I have found favor (grace, *chen*) in your sight, do not pass by your servant.

As we know, God did stop at Abraham's tent and shared a meal with him. Later, God revealed His plans to Abraham. Because God stopped, we know that He favored Abraham. Why, because he, like Noah and Lot, walked in God's ways and were pleasing to Him ⁵.

Ruth was another who found *grace*. After Boaz discovered her gleaning in his fields, he instructed his workers to not harass her and she answered –

^{ESV} Ruth 2:10 Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"

The answer, of course, was that she, a Moabites, had left her home and attached herself to the God of Israel and had come to serve her mother-in-law. Because of her acts of kindness and obedience, Boaz was gracious to her.

Another case is that of Hannah. Hannah's name (חַנָּה) is from the same root as *chen* and is the feminine form of grace. She was the favored wife of Elkanah, a man who obviously walked with God. Hannah found favor in God's eyes after praying for a child. After the child was weaned, she made good on her vow by bring Samuel to Shiloh to serve under the priests. At that time, she prayed a prayer about the greatness, power, and steadfastness of YHVH as our protection and shield. Thus Hannah found favor in God.

To summarize what we've seen, *grace* is God's protection upon His people – those who walk in His ways and those called for His purpose. God favors those who please Him and thus protects them and will ultimately give them peace – shalom.

Since there is a clear link – via the LXX – between grace in the Tnakh and that in the New Testament, we can better understand the words of the apostles by using this background. We'll discuss those New Testament passages next time.

⁵ Gen. 7:1; 2 Peter 2:7