



What Shepherds Need to Know about the Biblical Meaning of “Rod”

Addendum: Covenant, Curse, Yoke, Staff/Rod

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When I began this study series some years ago it became apparent to me that it might actually happen that any word that has a “lamed” in it, *ל* the shepherd’s staff in the paleo-Hebrew, pictographic form, might have bearing on the role of shepherding. At a completely unexpected time I have found another example that would seem to bear this out. It is another beautifully and intricately woven picture of our relationship with Messiah and with one another. Now, having read Part 1 with all the ins and outs of examining the different meanings of words for staff and rod, please consider this additional piece. May it be a blessing to you as it was for us here!

In the course of examining the question of the Biblical meaning of the phrase [“a root of bitterness”](#) I came to see the thematic connection between two verses:

*Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:
Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any **root of bitterness**
springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;*

Hebrews 12: 14-15 KJV

*Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away
this day from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be
among you a **root that beareth gall and wormwood;***

Deuteronomy 29:18 KJV

I saw that the author of Hebrews was making that thematic connection of concern that reflected what Moses had written. You will find all the details in the study linked above but for my purpose this time of looking at the rod meaning implied, we will move on to the second part of the verse.

*And it come to pass, **when he heareth the words of this curse,
that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace,
though I walk in the imagination of mine heart,***

to add drunkenness to thirst:

The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven.

Deuteronomy 29:19-20 KJV

Clearly there is a danger described here, that if the root of bitterness has set in, and someone has turned away from our Elohim, then they could easily begin to think that they can just bless themselves and continue to do whatever they want to do, whether they speak it out loud or just believe so in the heart.

At this point it became necessary to examine the context more closely to find out why there was a reference to a curse when the covenant had been under discussion in the previous chapter.



A thorough understanding of what covenant is about is very helpful and that study is highly recommended. Examining the ancient and most functional aspects of the Hebrew language also provides clearer images. A covenant is usually referred to by the Hebrew word transliterated as “*brit*”, Strong’s #1285, and has to do with the cutting of a covenant through the picture of the animals split in two and laid out for the participants to walk between, but a functional relationship seems to exist between that picture of covenant and this one. And here is where the lamed makes an appearance.

In brief, this word used here, translated as “curse” is Strong’s #423, transliterated as **alah** and meaning “an imprecation, a curse, swearing or an oath.” A covenant can also be described then as an agreement, a swearing or an oath, between two parties. There are several forms consistent with ancient history. A Royal Grant and a Suzerainty Treaty are two prominent examples. In this case, we are considering the suzerain type in which mutual oaths are understood between both parties. Usually it is between a party of greater power or authority and one of lesser power or authority. Very briefly stated, the greater agrees to provide various things in exchange for the loyalty and service of the lesser. Such agreements usually include description of what the punishment will be for failing to keep their oaths. The one of greater power is able to enforce it this way. So the lesser party is agreeing in advance to receive the discipline/curse should they depart from the agreement.

Looking to the pictographic meaning of the word *alah* as stated in AHLB we find this.

The yoking together of two parties. A treaty or covenant binds two parties together through an oath (yoke). The oath included blessings for abiding by the covenant and curses for breaking the covenant (see Deuteronomy 28). The God of the Hebrews was seen as the older ox that is yoked to his people in a covenant relationship.

Looking back a little further to the pictographic meanings, AHLB has this to say about the closely related word *al* which can be translated as “yoke, ox and strength.”

The pictograph  is a picture of an ox head and also represents its strength. The  is a picture of a shepherd staff and also represents the authority of the shepherd. Combined these two pictographs mean "the strong authority" and can be anyone or thing of strong authority.

The yoke is understood as a "staff on the shoulders" (see Isaiah 9:4) in order to harness their power for pulling loads such as a wagon or plow. Hence, the two pictographs can also represent "the ox in the yoke". Often two oxen were yoked together. An older, more experienced ox would be teamed up (yoked) with a younger, less experienced ox. The older ox in the yoke is the "strong authority" who, through the yoke, teaches the younger ox.

These descriptions include a reference to Deuteronomy 28, which provides the context to understand the verse and reference in question here in Deuteronomy 29.

So, this covenant agreement that provides mutual benefit is pictured as a yoke, but when one party resists it, that same agreement becomes a curse. When pulling together with a stronger partner all is well. When deciding to pull in another direction things change. In this reference, the concern is that one who has turned away from the Father and His ways may at some point begin to take it all on himself, imagining that he can bless himself, do his own stubborn thing and not suffer.

But for the pictographic meaning of "curse," I wouldn't have considered looking at the meanings of rod, staff or yoke here. Vine's Expository Dictionary of the Old and New Testaments does not include OT entries for rod, staff, or yoke, but they are represented in the NT. Mostly literal representations of the Greek words used, there isn't a lot to add to the discussion here with one possible exception. He notes that yoke, or yoked, is represented by the Greek word, *zugos*, a noun meaning "a yoke, serving to couple two things together" and that it may be used metaphorically of submission to authority, as in Mathew 11:29,30: "of Christ's "yoke" not simply imparted by Him but shared with Him" or of bondage, or "to denote a balance." A dual form is *zeugos*, meaning a pair of animals and there is also "*heterozugeo*" meaning "to be unequally yoked" as seen here.

Do not be **unequally yoked** *with* unbelievers.
For what partnership does righteousness *have* with lawlessness?
And what fellowship does light *have* with darkness?
2 Corinthians 6:14 KJV

Many have understood that it is best to walk our lives out with those of similar faith but have also understood that our Messiah suffered and died for our freedom and that we are now free to do whatever we choose. They might then have difficulty understanding why this "blessing yourself" issue is a problem.

An answer is found in what it means to pursue holiness.

"Holiness" is the usual English translation of the Hebrew word "*Kadosh*." You will find a [word study](#) on this in our guest authors/articles section of the website.

*Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods?
who is like thee, glorious **in holiness**,
fearful in praises, doing wonders?
Exodus 15:11 KJV*

In brief, Kadosh is Strong's #6944, and means a consecrated thing. Being consecrated means that it has been set apart for a certain use. In truth, the concept of "holy" means that something is set apart, but it doesn't specify for WHAT use. We can be set apart to our God as much as we could be set apart to the Adversary, satan. As this verse implies, our YHWH God is set apart and glorious in Himself. There is no other like Him. He is glorious and without compare and set apart from all else. His way is different from all others.

When we are yoked to Him in covenant, we are being guided to walk in His way, in His direction. If we are pulling with Him there is blessing but if we pull contrary to Him, there will be a curse. The yoke is like the staff across the shoulders, directly guiding us. This picture too, is almost intuitive in the imagery as I also recall that Isaiah told us:

*For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the **government** will be upon
His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Isaiah 9:6 NKJV*

The Hebrew word used there under government does not have any linguistic connection that I could quickly see, but it certainly has a visual and metaphoric connection. Who else but Messiah Yeshua, our Elohim, would be the stronger more experienced One that could bear the staff of direction on His own shoulder in order to correctly nurture us?

Yet in our human weakness and immaturity, He has provided for us to have elders, shepherds **who are themselves under His yoke**, to act as a yoke or staff or rod of guidance for us. As I have said and written many times before, not every person is yet equipped to receive and walk in His counsel directly from Him until they have matured. In provision for that vulnerable time, He has called some to be shepherds to tend to His flock until He returns.

I haven't looked today, but I would be willing to speculate that there is somewhere an indication of the yoke of the ungodly that can be just as compelling initially, though not as rewarding in the long run. Perhaps another "little gem" study some day.

This yoke is the wooden one like the staff of a shepherd as compared to an iron one that would be like the rod of an authority or oppressor, normally being too heavy for one to bear. But oh, we know that those who have not yet submitted to the wooden staff of the shepherd will one day meet that iron rod of the Returning King!

Conclusions

- A covenant is an agreement, an oath that carries both blessing and curse, depending on our response.
- An agreement to walk together is physically pictured in a yoke that will provide blessing or curse, depending on our response to it. Being shepherded by an elder is a human picture of one of greater strength or maturity helping another. If both parties share a similar goal, there will be blessing. If either pulls in an opposite direction, there will be stress.
- The yoke is a physical picture of the staff or rod of our elder, Messiah Yeshua, laid directly on Him as we choose to yoke ourselves in tandem with Him. He bears the greater burden for our good.

All things are delivered unto me of my Father:
and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father;
neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son,
and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me;
for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
Matthew 11:27-30 KJV

Abba, Father,

How amazing is Your Word in depth and consistency no matter what image or metaphor you bring to our attention! How grateful we are that the rod and staff of our Messiah is there- easy and not burdensome-to guide us through all the perplexities of life. It doesn't change our faith one way or the other to see this connection between covenant and rods, staffs, and yokes, and the resultant blessings or cursing, but it does bring yet another beautiful picture to mind of how much You have been willing to meet us where we are, if we will only let You direct us. In asking us to receive Your yoke, you are asking us to agree to the covenant relationship established for us by our Father and our forefathers. Whether we realized it or not, now I see that in accepting that covenant, we have also accepted responsibility and our part in whether You are able to bless us ...or not.

Now I see more fully the image of the government being on Your shoulders, and why You challenged Paul as to how long he would "kick against the goads." How often we have kicked back against Your guidance and tried to go our own ways. How often we have felt the burden grow heavier as a result. We were going the wrong way!

How often shepherds try to provide the guidance and direction that they can see their sheep need only to have them buck and kick back. We, too, must lean into the direction You are calling us, or the burden WILL become too much for us alone. Thank you for the rod and staff laid

across our shoulders that allows us to benefit from Your strength as we work toward the unity we all desire in You. Thank You for being close by in Your strength to sustain us even when we do misstep and please do quickly draw us back to Your way.

Please may we learn under Your guidance and direction, and thus guide and direct those You have put with us. May it be so, In Yeshua's Name. Omayne.

Resources

Blue Letter Bible. Org

E-Sword Bible

Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of the Old and New Testaments.

Ancient Hebrew Lexicon of the Bible, Jeff E. Benner, www.ancient-hebrew.org