

Lesson Ten: Some notes on using Hebrew in Sermons and Sermon Preparation

Generally speaking, the point of studying Hebrew is to give one greater facility in the understanding of the text of the Old Testament. The idea is that the message of truth will be clearer when one can work with it in the original language as opposed to the use of multiplied translations removed by centuries from the autographs. Therefore the use of Hebrew in sermonizing is not to be able to point out what Hebrew term is used here or there but to glean a fresher appreciation of what the text says and then to communicate that to the audience.

So first of all, Hebrew should be used for one's daily study and better mastery of the text. Seminarians err when they lay it aside in the preference for more ready-made sermonic helps. Nothing will produce better results overall than the study of the Scripture in the original languages. It is not a product, however, that materializes suddenly from the dust. It is the end of a process of study that is made part of the disciplined life of the worker. Consequently the following ideas, while not mandated, are important from our point of view.

1. Be a student of the Scripture. Do more than just study for sermons. That is necessary, of course. But somewhere in the activities of life there must be room for the study of Scripture not for an immediate cause but for the ultimate one of knowing the Word better. A program of systematic study needs to be adopted or created and if one cannot do so on one's own initiative, there are study programs available for purchase.

2. Do part of the study regularly in the original languages. You may simply wish to use a devotional guide such as LIGHT ON THE PATH. You may prefer to do a daily study of some favorite passage or book on a day by day basis. But the study involves the reading, translation, and note taking on a passage that renders it more meaningful to you. The use of the original language materials will make you aware of things you will not see otherwise. But this must necessarily be done in a disciplined way...not with a spirit of rigidity, but with a consistent will as much as is possible.

3. Plan to do no preaching from passages where you have not consulted or mastered the Hebrew/Greek, etc., forms. Sometimes this may prove to be impossible but allow individual situations to dictate such need, do not anticipate or create them in advance.

4. As a general principle, plan to show the fruit of your study in the giving of your messages not in the proclamation of your learning. This is general and somewhat personal but I think it is pedantic to announce "the Hebrew says" when most of the audience have no assurance or knowledge of Hebrew. I think it is quite right to announce that a particular work or phrase or context may have this or that meaning by statement or implication as you develop the message. If there are interested parties who want to see how the original works these things out you can discuss that on a more intimate and thorough level later. But as a guiding principle, allow your study to enrich your understanding and show this enrichment in the development of your biblical presentation, not in the demonstration of formal study.

5. You may, of course, have a specialized audience at times...more likely