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# BIBLICAL HEBREW WORDS

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Man in Society (*contd.*)

The Man of Property

The ideal of Hebrew life, until it was in part distorted by the false values of the royal court, was to be a prosperous landowner. The story of Naboth (1 Ki. 21:1-3) gives a striking picture of what property meant to the Israelite. For Naboth it was not merely a question of property, but of ancestral property. The land was Jehovah's and He had given it to the people by lot (Josh. 14:2). To hold ancestral property was equivalent to proof of one's right to live in the land. That is why Lev. 25 does not merely guarantee the return of land in the year of Jubilee, but of ancestral land. That is one reason why the landless man, even if he did not have to become a hired labourer or a slave, was looked on as a second class citizen.

Since the holding of ancestral property was in itself virtually a sign of divine approval, it was assumed that this approval would show itself in prosperity—a very relative term in a simple society in which money played virtually no part. Note the tone of security in the answer of the Shunammite to Elisha (1 Ki. 4:13).

The technical term for these prosperous landowners was *'ish chayil*, or *gibbor chayil*, or *'ish gibbor chayil*, normally translated '(mighty) man of valour' or '(mighty) man of wealth', the two renderings being more closely connected than may at first sight seem obvious. *Chayil* means equally property, wealth, power and army. The real strength and power of the land lay in the free landed peasantry, and until the introduction of mercenary troops under the monarchy the backbone of the national militia, the host (*tsaba*'), was provided by them. Only the context can decide whether military prowess or social situation is being stressed.

Indeed the expression belongs to those which by their very nature are used loosely. It can mean simply those who show the character that is to be expected from an, *'ish chayil*. A good

example is Gen. 47:6, where 'able men' (RV, RSV) gets the general sense, but misses the point that for such an appointment men of standing as well as ability among the newcomers were expected. The same criticism holds even more strongly in Ex. 18:21. In Jdg. 11:1 we are presumably to infer not merely Jephthah's ability as a soldier—it is doubtful whether courage is ever being particularly stressed—but also success in his bandit activities. Our interpretation of I Sa. 16:18 will depend in part on how we explain the complicated problem of David's introduction to Saul, but in any case *gibbor chayil* must be to some extent a courtesy title. It means presumably that David was a worthy son of a prosperous landowner—who in I Sa. 16:20 sends a donkey-load of bread, a skin of wine and a kid as a present to Saul; that was the scale of prosperity in Bethlehem. The best proof that *gibbor chayil* need have little relation to the battle-field is that in David's case it needs to be qualified at once by 'a man of war.' If we follow AV, RV in 2 Sa. 23:20, 'the son of a landowner of Kabzeel' would express the meaning well enough—Moffatt and RSV presumably follow LXX; that their rendering is too strong is shown by the addition, 'a doer of great deeds' (RSV). The translation 'worthy man' (RV, RSV) in Ki. 1:42, 52 is about as good as we can find—'gentleman' has been suggested, see ICC *ad loc.*—but it is obvious that it completely fails to get the colour of the original. Moffatt shows his frequent infelicity by rendering 'an honest fellow' in v. 42.

I Sa. 14:52 brings together *gibbor* (cf. Vol. XXVI p.35) and *ben chayil*, and the English translations fail to distinguish adequately between them. The former is as usual a mighty man or hero; the latter implies a young man of good family who showed his breeding in his fighting ability, a concept easier to grasp than to translate.

The feminine of '*ish chayil*' is '*eshet chayil*'. This implies a woman of good standing who is worthy to be the wife of an '*ish chayil*', so Ruth 3:11, or one who has proved herself a suitable wife as in Prov. 31:10. The RSV 'a woman of worth' in the former passage is preferable to 'a virtuous woman', but 'a good wife' in the latter is too colourless.

In this context it is worth mentioning the 'am ha-' *arets*; this expression simply means 'the people of the land', and its meaning varies from time to time. In New Testament times, cf. John 7:49, and especially from the destruction of the Temple till about 200 A.D. it meant the mass of the population who wished to ignore the Law where it did not suit them, and who were only slowly and reluctantly brought under the rabbinic yoke. The plural term in Ezra. 3:3, 10:2; Neh. 10:28-30 means the heathen and semi-heathen peoples living in Palestine at the time of the return and is not really the same phrase. In Hag. 2:4 'people of the land' may be used in its earlier sense, or it may be the prophet's way of stressing that God had restored the land to the people. In a number of passages, however, 2 Ki. 11:14, 21:24, 23:30,35; Jer. 1:18; Ezek. 7:27, the phrase 'am ha-' *arets* is a collective expressing the totality of the '*ish hayil*'. There is no evidence for its use in Israel in contrast to Judah, but this may be due to accident. Since there is some evidence for hostility between the court circles and nobility of Jerusalem and the people of the land, it may be that it was originally used in contempt, which would help to explain its contemptuous use in the mouth of the rabbis at a very much later date.

(Next issue: 'The Organization of Society'.)

## 'THERE ARE MANY ADVERSARIES'

*'I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost, for a great door and effectual is opened unto me, AND THERE ARE MANY ADVERSARIES'* (1 Cor. 16:8, 9).

One of those wonderful sidelights we get of the rugged Apostle shines out here: 'I will *tarry* . . . for a great door is opened . . . and there are *many adversaries*.' That is, 'my post is here where the hostilities are fiercest!' We get the vision of a man tremendous in his unflinching courage and his devotion to duty.

In one of his inimitable sermons Jowett pictures the more usual style in which men argue when facing spiritual odds: