

The “Heart” of God’s Word

Study Guide by Rev. John M. Young

The Greek word for “heart” is *kardia* (), which is the root of our English words *cardiac* and *cardiologist*. However, in the Biblical manner of speaking, the “heart” is not always what we think of in our American idiom, although sometimes it is.

Luke 3:15

The people were *wondering* in their “hearts”

Luke 1:51

King James Version (KJV) says “proud in the imagination of their hearts.” New International Version (NIV) interprets this as “those who are proud in their *inmost hearts*” (emphasis added)

Luke 9:47

This is another verse attributing “thoughts” to the heart; NIV leaves out the word *heart* here, because it is not our usual way of speaking in English. The Greek word for “thoughts” is clearly speaking of a rational process, which we would tend to think of as taking place in the “head.”

Mark 2:6

Same as Luke 9:47, KJV has “reasoning in their hearts,” with the related Greek verb referring to a rational, deliberative process of reasoning. NIV thus translates this as “thinking to themselves.”

Matthew 15:19

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander” (NIV). Not only thoughts, but evil thoughts, come from the “heart.” Many of the items on this list we might also attribute to the heart if we were emphasizing the emotional basis for them, but these are largely matters of the *will*.

Luke 24:32

The “burning” of the hearts of the Emmaus disciples could be described as an emotional response.

Luke 24:38

The NIV has the risen Jesus asking the disciples, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?” The KJV and other versions are more literal: “Why do thoughts [or questionings] arise in your hearts?” The disciples knew Jesus had died, so it did not seem logical that they should see him alive. This logical analysis took place in their *kardia* (“heart”).

2 Corinthians 2:4

Deep emotions like “anguish” filled Paul’s heart.

John 16:6

The KJV reads, “But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.” The NIV says, “...you are filled with grief.” Certainly the sense is the same, but the Greek does attribute sorrow or grief to the heart.

1 Corinthians 4:5

This says that the Lord will “expose the motives of people’s hearts” (Today’s NIV). The Revised Standard Version (RSV) says he will “disclose the purposes of the heart.” The word for “motives” or “purposes” is translated by KJV as “counsels” and has a basic meaning in Greek of “will” or “purpose” or “desire.”

2 Corinthians 9:7

A “decision” is made in the “heart.”

Luke 21:14

While KJV says, “Settle it therefore in your hearts,” NIV has “But make up your mind.” As in 2 Corinthians 9:7, a decision-making process is at work.

2 Thessalonians 2:17

Here we are “comforted” or “encouraged” in heart.

Hebrews 8:10

God’s Law is written on our “hearts,” that is, at the very core of our being.

James 1:26

The “heart” can be “deceived.” The NIV says, “...he deceives *himself*” (emphasis added), but the point is that such a person is deceived at the core of his or her being.

Romans 16:18

As in James 1:26, the “heart” is said to be “deceived.” You can find the word “heart” (translating *kardia*) in the KJV, but NIV has it as “mind.”

Some people may be concerned that the NIV has mistranslated those passages where they do not have the word “heart” and the Greek does have *kardia*, but in reality they have done a better job of translating to our American English way of speaking and thinking. The biblical concept of “heart” encompasses not only what we think of as “heart” but also “mind”, “will”, and “self”.

In addition, the language of the New Testament can refer to deep emotions (especially compassion) with the word *splanchna* () meaning “intestines.”

Luke 15:20 — the father in the parable of the prodigal son.

Luke 10:13 — Luke 10:13 Although this verse reveals much heartfelt emotion, see also **Luke 10:33**, in which the Good Samaritan has compassion on the man beaten by robbers.

Luke 7:13 — Jesus pities the widow at Nain.

Philemon 1, 12, 20 — See also verse 7. In these three verses, Paul talks about his own “heart” and the “hearts of the saints,” if you read it in the NIV. The KJV is more literal and refers to the “bowels.” The point is that these are deep emotions, which we may well say we feel “in our gut.”

Philippians 1:8 — Paul tells the Philippians that he longs for them “with the affection of Christ Jesus” in the NIV, or again, much more literally in the KJV, “in the bowels of Jesus Christ.”

Colossians 3:12 — The “clothing” of the Christian includes “bowels of mercies” (KJV) or simply “compassion” (NIV).

1 John 3:17 — The injunction is against those who “have no pity” (NIV); the RSV splits the difference by saying “closes his heart,” but the KJV is almost too literal here when it says, “shutteth up his bowels.”

Mark 6:34 — Jesus was moved with compassion for the crowd — He “felt it in His gut.”

Matthew 18:27 — The master of the servant with a tremendous debt was moved with compassion; this is the same Greek verb as in Mark 6:34.

Deuteronomy 6:5 — “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” When this verse from Hebrew is quoted in the Gospels, it is with various combinations of “heart”, “soul”, “mind”, and “power”. Clearly the biblical authors themselves were aware that there is some overlap and variation in scope of the meanings of words when moving from one language to another, and they were trying to capture the essence of the Hebrew using Greek vocabulary.