



The Semantics of Biblical Language:

James Barr

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Behind the academic and innocently descriptive title of this book is to be found one of the most explosive works of biblical scholarship to be published this century. Certainly many of those who read it on its first appearance were never the same again, and it signalled the end of what had hitherto been a flourishing literature on 'biblical theology'. 'In recent years,' Professor Barr wrote in his Preface, have come to believe that one of the greatest dangers to sound and adequate interpretation of the Bible comes from the prevailing use of procedure, which, while claiming to rest upon a knowledge of the Israelite and Greek ways of thinking, constantly mishandle and distort the linguistic evidence of the Hebrew and Greek languages as they are used in the Bible. The increasing sense of dependence upon the Bible by the modern church only makes this danger more serious. The fact that these procedures have never to my knowledge been collected, analysed and criticized in detail was the chief stimulus to my undertaking of this task myself.' His conclusions were devastating and drew down on him a good deal of often hurt criticism: however, twenty years later, they still stand and the passage of time has made them more widely accepted. Certainly this book, issued for the first time in a paperback edition, is essential reading for any student of the Bible, if he is to learn from the mistakes of others.

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