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OT504.OA

### Analysis of a Hebrew Word

The verse to be analyzed is Genesis 2:15 and the Hebrew word to be analyzed is the word for “keep”.

4 Translations of Genesis 2:15:

ESV: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”

NIV: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”

CSB: “The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it.”

TLB: “The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden as its gardener, to tend and care for it.”

In the ESV it translates it as “keep”, the NIV translates as “take care of”, the CSB translates it as “watch over” and the TLB translates it to “tend and care for it”. It seems that the NIV, CSB and TLB are more descriptive on how the garden is to be “kept” by man. These translations give you a sense of how man was to be responsible of what God had given to them. With the ESV it says “keep” which is more general.

In the original Hebrew that part of the verse is written as, “וְלִשְׁמֹרָהּ”, which can be translated “and to keep it”<sup>1</sup>. The root of that word and the Hebrew word that will be studied in this essay is “šāmar” (שָׁמַר), which is a verb<sup>2</sup>. Per Strong’s lexicon it states that it is a primitive

<sup>1</sup> H8104 - šāmar - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (esv)." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed 11 Feb, 2023. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h8104/esv/wlc/0-4/#lexResults>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

root<sup>3</sup>. For the definition of this word, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, states that this word is translated as “to keep, tend, watch over, retain”<sup>4</sup> and further explains three different ways it can be examined. It can mean keeping that is the sense of someone taking care of and tending to something, a keeping that is watching over or giving attention to and lastly to keep in the sense of saving or retaining<sup>5</sup>. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon* it defines it similarly as “keep, watch, preserve”<sup>6</sup>.

Diving deeper into the study of the word “šāmar” (שמר), it is seen that as part of Strong’s definition they give, “to hedge about (as with thorns)”<sup>7</sup>. This gives imagery of protection. Protection from things on the outside that should not come in. This word is also used later on in the chapter to describe what the cherubim were responsible with after man was cast out of the garden, “He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Gen 3:24, ESV)<sup>8</sup>. The ESV translates this as guard. These cherubim were to now protect the way to the tree of life from anyone. They were tasked to keep in the sense of guarding the entrance to the tree of life. Another example of where this word is used is in 1 Samuel 26:15, “And David said to Abner, “Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy the king your lord”<sup>9</sup>. The *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, points out in this verse that

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<sup>3</sup> James Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 118.

<sup>4</sup> Vine, W. E., M. F. Unger, and W. White. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992), 419.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 419-420.

<sup>6</sup> Francis Broan, S R. (Samuel Rolles) Driver, and Charles A. (Charles Augustus) Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Academic, 1994)

<sup>7</sup> Strong, 118.

<sup>8</sup> "Genesis 3 (ESV) - He drove out the man,." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed 11 Feb, 2023. [https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/gen/3/24/p0/t\\_conc\\_3024](https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/gen/3/24/p0/t_conc_3024)

<sup>9</sup> 1 Samuel 26 (ESV) - And David said to Abner,." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed 11 Feb, 2023. [https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/1sa/26/15/p0/t\\_concf\\_262015](https://www.blueletterbible.org/esv/1sa/26/15/p0/t_concf_262015)

the word is used in the sense of “‘watching over’ or giving attention to”<sup>10</sup>. In this context David is actually chiding Abner for not watching over or protecting Saul. Something also interesting to note is according to Vine’s Dictionary, “not only does šāmar signify watching, but it signifies doing it as a *watchman* in the sense of fulfilling a responsibility: “And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city . . .” (Judg. 1:24).”<sup>11</sup>.

According to Strong, the word “šāmar” (שמר) appears 469 times in 440 verses<sup>12</sup>. It is used throughout the Old Testament and in several different genres such as the Torah, Prophets and Psalms. It seems to be used in a variety of genres such as narratives and poetry. As seen in the previous paragraph the word is used in various different places and can have certain meaning emphasized depending on the context. In some places more of being watchful, taking care of or protecting. Additionally, if the verb is used closely with another it can signify doing something carefully or watchfully<sup>13</sup>.

As we look at this verse in Genesis, we see that God had put man in the garden to “keep it” (ESV). From the definitions found from this word there is a sense of responsibility that God gives to man regarding the garden. From this research I would conclude that this word would could be translated as “to watch over and tend to”. This would give a sense of the care that man was to give the garden, but also emphasize the responsibility. Also, that there is something to be watched over, which implies some kind of protection over the garden. They are to make sure that everything is cared for and to watch out for anything that could come in and be harmful to what God put them in charge over.

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<sup>10</sup> Vine, 419.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 420.

<sup>12</sup> H8104 - šāmar - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (esv)." Blue Letter Bible. Accessed 11 Feb, 2023. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h8104/esv/wlc/0-4/#lexResults>

<sup>13</sup> Vine, 420.

This word is important to this verse because it helps the reader to understand that God not only put man in the garden, but also gave man responsibility over it. Understanding the depth of the word “šāmar” (שָׁמַר), helps the reader to understand the level of responsibility over it. They were to take particular care of what God had given to them and to make sure they protected it from anything that would harm. Looking ahead the reader sees that something did come into the garden that caused harm. What came in was a serpent that deceived Eve and then Adam into disobeying God’s command, which in turn let sin into the garden and into the world. From this it makes sense why God charged them to “keep it”, because he knew something would come to try to harm and destroy the good in that garden. Not just the plants and animal life, but the direct communion that man had with God in the garden. As we know, sin separates, it ultimately separates us from God, which is the most important relationship. So how can this apply to a modern reader? For a modern reader they can see that we need to be watchful in this world because sin and the enemy are always ready to start trying to separate us from God and each other. As Peter says, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8, ESV). We are charged to be watchful because we do have an enemy who is ready to destroy. As seen in Genesis, the enemy comes as a serpent to deceive and destroy. The thing that Eve forgot is that she had direct access to God, she was not alone to face the enemy. It is the same for those in Christ, we are not alone and have direct access. As Peter further states in verse 9, we are to stand “firm” in our faith, which enables us to resist the enemy. God may have set man over things, but He did not leave him alone to fend for himself. Those things are what we need to remind ourselves of and equip ourselves with so when we see the enemy come, we are able to defend ourselves and what God has put in our care. Additionally, this demonstrates that we are to take care and be watchful over

the things that God puts in our care. Just like the enemy wants to devour and destroy us, he also wants to destroy the good things in our care as well. Whether we are parents, teachers, business owners, etc., we have things God entrusts us with “to keep”. We are to tend to them well and watch over them to the best of our ability and we are able to continually ask God to help us to take care of them well.

Overall, it can be seen that taking a deeper dive into the word “šāmar” (שָׁמַר) gave this verse more color and brought in different connections that revealed something about God and helps us grow in our walk with God.

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