

לב

Meaning:

- The heart
- Used figuratively for the feelings, the will and even the intellect
- The centre of anything

Noun, masculine. Occurs nearly 600 times in the Old Testament.

Range of Meaning in the Bible

Occasionally used for the physical organ of the heart, for example “Nabal’s heart died within him” ([1 Samuel 25:37](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_big1 Samuel 25:37

Hebrew וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר בַּצֹּאת הַלֵּיל מִן־כֶּלֶל וַתֵּגֵד לּוֹ אִשְׁתּוֹ אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיָּמָת לִבּוֹ בְּקִרְבּוֹ וְהוּא הָיָה לֵאבֶן ESV In the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. NIV Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things, and his heart failed him and he became like a stone. καὶ πρῶτῳ ἐξέζηνη ψενὰ πὸ τοῦ οἴνου ἀπήγγειλ...).

Often used to describe the inner Person or mind, the seat of thought, reflection, and understanding. Hebrew anthropology sees thinking as occurring in the heart (rather than the brain). For example, “The LORD saw that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” ([Genesis 6:5](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigGenesis 6:5

Hebrew וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ וְכָל יִצְרָל מַחְשַׁבַת לִבּוֹ רָק רָע כָּל הַיּוֹם ESV The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. NIV The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. ἰδὼν δὲ κύριος ὅθεος ὅτι ἐπληθύνθησαν αἰκακαίαι τῶν ἀνθρώπων· πάντες ἦσαν ὁ γὰρ...

The word also describes a person's will or intention, that is, the centre of a person's decisions and moral choices. For example, “Pharaoh hardened his heart” ([Exodus 8:15](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigExodus 8:5

Hebrew וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לַפְּרֹעֹה הַתַּפְּאָר עָלַי לְמַתִּי אֶעֱתִיר לָךְ וְלַעֲבָדֶיךָ וְלַעֲמָךְ לְהַכְרִית הַצִּפְרִדִּים מִמֶּךָּ וּמִבְתֵּיךָ רַק בִּיֹאֵר ESV And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the canals and over the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt!’” NIV δὲ κύριος πρὸς τὸν ἄδελφόν σου ἔκτεινον τὴν χειρὶν ὅπως ἀβδὸν σου ἐπὶ τοὺς ποταμοὺς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς καὶ ἀνάγει τοὺς βατ...), meaning he made a deliberate choice.

The לב is also the source of feelings—joy, fear, courage, or sorrow. For example, “Take heart, all you who hope in the LORD” ([Psalm 31:24](#)).

And sometimes the word refers to one's sense of right and wrong, for example, “David’s heart struck him” ([1 Samuel 24:5](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_big1 Samuel 24:5

Hebrew וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲנֹשִׁי דָוִד אֵלָיו הֲזֶה הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי דָוִד אֶת אִיבִידְךָ אֵיבִידְךָ בְּיָדְךָ וְעָשִׂיתָ לוֹ כְּאִשֶּׁר
 ESV And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. NIV Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα καὶ ἐπάταξεν καρ...), or in other words, his conscience troubled him.

Theological Significance

The לב represents the core of human identity—thought, feeling, and will united.

God judges the לב: “Man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart” ([1 Samuel 16:7](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_big1 Samuel 16:7)

Hebrew וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל שָׁמוּאֵל אַל תִּבְטֹ אֶל מְרֹאֶהוּ וְאֶל גְּבוֹהָ קוֹמָתוֹ כִּי מֵאִסְתֵּיהֶוּ כִּי לֹא אֲשֶׁר יֵרָאֶה הָאָדָם כִּי הָאָדָם
 ESV But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart. καὶ κύριος πρὸς μὴ ἐπιβλέψῃς ἐπὶ τὴν ὄψιν αὐτοῦ...).

The לב can be deceitful or pure, hard or soft, circumcised or uncircumcised (a metaphor for spiritual condition) ([Jeremiah 17:9](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigJeremiah 17:9)

Hebrew הַלֵּב הוּא מִי יֵדְעֵנוּ ESV The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? NIV The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? NLT “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? βαθεῖα ἡ καρδιά ἀπαρὰ πάντα καὶ ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν καὶ τίς αὐτόν... and [Deuteronomy 10:16](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigDeuteronomy 10:16

Hebrew וְכָל הַלֵּב הוּא מִי יֵדְעֵנוּ ESV Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. NIV Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. NLT Therefore, change your hearts and stop being stubborn. καὶ περιτεμεῖσθε τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν ὑμῶν καὶ τὸν τράχηλον ὑμῶν οὐ σκληρυνεῖτε ἔτι...).

The Shema ([Deuteronomy 6:5](#)plugin-autotooltip__default plugin-autotooltip_bigDeuteronomy 6:5)

Hebrew וְאָהַבְתָּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ ESV You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. NIV Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς δυνάμεώς σου...) commands love for God “with all your heart” - this means with your entire inner being, your mind, will, and emotion.

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