

## Hebrews 10:20 – A New and Living Way

*Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way (Hebrews 10:19-20a, NASB1995)*

Why do writers use unusual words? If there is a common, familiar word (or even various synonyms) why select a more obscure or dated term? Probably the most common reason is to communicate some nuance peculiar to the less ordinary word. Or an uncommon word may have almost subliminal associations from past usage, archaic meanings that we hardly remember.

Whatever his reasons, that seems to be what the pastor did in his sermon to the Hebrews. There are two common words in New Testament Greek for “new” each with its own nuance. Each is used in Hebrews.

- *καὶνός (kainos)* is found forty-one times in the New Testament, three in Hebrews (8:8, 8:13, 9:15), and emphasizes newness in kind or quality, having different characteristics.
- *νέος (neos)* is found twenty-three times, once in Hebrews (12:24), and emphasizes newness in time, something recently begun.

Contemplate the new under aspects of time, as that which has recently come into existence, and this is *νέος*.... But contemplate the new, not now under aspects of time, but of quality, the new, as set over against that which has seen service, the outworn, the effete or marred through age, and this is *καὶνός*....<sup>1</sup>

Hebrews uses both words for “new” in describing the covenant. The covenant is new as a different *kind* of covenant (8.8, 8.13, 9.15). The covenant is also new as a recent replacement the old covenant from Sinai (12:24).

But in the climactic description (10:20) of what Jesus has accomplished as “a new and living way” the writer chooses a different word, *πρόσφατος (prosphatos)*. In fact, this verse is the only place in the New Testament where any writer uses the term. The Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint,

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<sup>1</sup> Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 219-220.

LXX) uses the word only five times (Numbers 6:3, Deuteronomy 32:17, Psalm 81:9, Ecclesiastes 1:9, Sirach 9:10), and the meaning in those verses is not always translated “new.”

The original meaning of *prosphatos* probably explains why the pastor chose that unusual term to express the “newness” of the way opened for us to draw near to God by Jesus.

The word “new” in the Greek text is very interesting. It is *prosphaton*, made up of *pros* meaning “near to,” and *phatos* from *pephamai* the perfect of *phenein* “to kill.” The original meaning of the total word is “newly-slain.” Here the contrast is between the “old-slain road” of the earthly tabernacle where the high priest would sprinkle the blood of the sacrificial animal seven times on the ground as he approached the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies (Lev. 16:14), and the freshly-slain road into the Holy of Holies of heaven, sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb of God. Over this latter road is the Jewish recipient of this letter urged to come.<sup>2</sup>

And another perspective shows the merging of both senses of “new” in the single word.

The way is defined as *πρόσφατον*, “new,” a term having both a temporal and a qualitative nuance. Temporally, the community possesses a way that had not previously existed, which is the result of the definitive sacrifice of Christ. It is a recently opened way (cf. 9:8), in contrast to the old way into the earthly sanctuary that has been set aside as a mere prefiguration of what was to come (cf. 8:13; 10:1). The way is also qualitatively new because it participates in the incorruptible freshness of the new covenant, which will not become old.<sup>3</sup>

And note the pastor’s rhetorical excellence. Jesus has prepared a way that is “new and living.” Considering the history of the word discussed above, the original audience would possibly have recognized the suggestion of a way that was “freshly killed and living.” That nuance would reinforce the reality of Jesus’ sacrifice. The Resurrected One who was “freshly killed” and yet gloriously alive opened a way that is “new and living.”

Over one hundred English translations<sup>4</sup> render *prosphatos* simply as “new,” but the Phillips paraphrase captures the nuance.

So by virtue of the blood of Jesus, you and I, my brothers, may now have courage to enter the holy of holies by way of the one who died and is yet alive.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, *Hebrews in the Greek New Testament*, Word Studies in the Greek New Testament; Volume II (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 179.

<sup>3</sup> William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1991), 283.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Hebrews%2010:20>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%2010:19-21&version=PHILLIPS> (1972 edition).