

New Testament word study: *kardiognōstēs*: “knower of the hearts”

This word occurs only twice in the New Testament, and consists of *kardia* (“heart”) with *ginōskō* (“to know”).

We find both occurrences of *kardiognōstēs* in the Acts of Apostles. The *first* occurrence is in this important context in Acts 1:

¹⁵ “And in these days [i.e. after our Lord’s Ascension, but before Pentecost] Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren, and said (and there was a multitude of persons gathered together, about a hundred and twenty):

“Brethren, it was needful that the Scripture should be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit [*to pneuma to hagion*: the Holy Spirit Himself] spake before by the mouth of David concerning Judas [referencing Psalm 69 and 109 below], who was guide to them that took Jesus.¹⁷ For he was numbered among us, and received his portion in this ministry.

¹⁸ (Now this man obtained a field with the reward of his iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch that in their language that field was called *Akeldama*, that is “The field of blood”) *

* [We revert to this text in detail and Judas’ death in next month’s word-study]

²⁰ FOR it is written in [“the”: omit; no definite article] [a] book of Psalms, “*Let his habitation be made desolate, And let no man dwell therein: and, His office let another take*”

[a composite quote from Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8 – hence Peter precisely refers to “it is written in a book of Psalms”, namely the 2nd Book containing both these Psalms].

²¹ Of the men therefore that have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day that He was received up from us, of these must one become a witness with us of His resurrection”.

²³ And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

²⁴ And they prayed, and said:

“**Thou, Lord, Who knowest the hearts** [*kardiognōstēs*] **of all men**, show of these two the one whom Thou hast chosen, to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas fell away, that he might go to his own place”.

²⁶ And they gave lots for them; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:15-26, ASV).

Literally in the Greek:

“Thou, Lord, Heart-Knower of ALL”
Su Kurie kardiognōsta pantōn

“Heart-Knower” (masculine noun) occurs, as stated, only twice in the New Testament.

AND interesting: it does not occur at all in the whole of the Septuagint (LXX); AND: it does not exist in classical Greek, either!

“Heart-Knower of ALL” is a *special* title of the Lord, revealed to us here for the very *first* time ever by the apostle Peter in Acts 1:24 – and in order to do so the Holy Spirit created a completely new Greek word;

(as indeed the Divine Author does on occasion; we have seen this in previous Word-Studies, e.g. *Theopneustos*: “God-breathed”).

As it is written:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?
I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins...” (Jeremiah 17:9-10, KJV).

“And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve HIM with a perfect heart and with a willing mind:

**FOR the LORD searcheth all hearts,
and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts:**

if thou seek HIM, HE WILL BE FOUND OF THEE;
but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever”.
(1 Chronicles 28:9, KJV).

“GOD came to Abimelech in a dream by night [on the occasion when “Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister”, and Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent, and took Sarah” - Genesis 20:2],
and said to him,

“Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife”.

But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said,

“Lord, wilt Thou slay also a righteous nation?”

Said he not unto me: “She is my sister?” and she, even she herself said, “He is my brother”; in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this”.

And God said unto him in a dream:

*“Yea, **I know** that thou didst this **in the integrity of thy heart**”
(Genesis 20:3-6, KJV).*

"I know also, my God, that **Thou triest the heart**, and hast pleasure in uprightness".
(1 Chronicles 29:17, KJV – on the occasion of king David's wonderful prayer in that chapter).

HENCE, as it is written regarding our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ:

"But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them,
And needed not that any should testify of man:
because **HE knew** [*ginōskō*] **all** [*pas*] [*men*];
for **HE knew** [*ginōskō*] **what was in man**".
(John 2:24-25, KJV).

THIS is our "Heart-Knower of ALL":

"HE knew all [men]....He knew what was in man".
"To Auton ginōskein pantas.....eginōsken ti ēn en anthrōpos".

[*ginōskō*]: "to learn to know, come to know, get a knowledge of, perceive, feel; to become known; to know, understand, have knowledge of" – *Strong/Thayer*;

Vine has this useful note (*excerpted with our edits and emphasis*):

ginōskō signifies "to be taking in knowledge, to come to know, recognize, understand," or "to understand completely";

(e.g., Mark 13:28, 29; John 13:12; 15:18; 21:17; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Hebrews 10:34; 1 John 2:5; 4:2, 6 (twice), 7, 13; 5:2, 20);

in its past tenses it frequently means "to know in the sense of realizing" (the aorist... tense usually indicating *definiteness*).

Thus in John 10:38: "that ye may know (*aorist tense*) and understand" (*present tense*);

(e.g. Matthew 13:11; Mark 7:24; John 7:26; 19:4; Acts 1:7; 17:19; Romans 1:21; 1 Corinthians 2:11 (2nd part), 14; 2 Corinthians 2:4; Ephesians 3:19; 6:22; Philippians 2:19; 3:10; 1 Timothy 3:5; 2 Timothy 2:19; James 2:20; 1 John 2:13 (twice), 14; 3:6; 4:8; 2 John 1:1; Revelation 2:24; 3:3, 9);

in the passive voice, it often signifies "to become known," (e.g., Matthew 10:26; Philippians 4:5);

in the sense of complete and absolute understanding on GOD's part, it is used e.g., in Luke 16:15; John 10:15 (*of the Son as well as the Father*); 1 Corinthians 3:20. In Luke 12:46 (KJV) it is rendered "He is . . . aware".

In the New Testament, *ginōskō* frequently indicates a relation between the person "knowing" and the object known; in this respect, what is "known" is of value or importance to the one who knows, and hence the establishment of the relationship, e.g., especially of God's "knowledge":

- 1 Corinthians 8:3, "if any man love God, the same is known of Him";
- Galatians 4:9, "to be known of God"; here the "knowing" suggests approval and bears the meaning "to be approved";

likewise in 2 Timothy 2:19; *compare*: John 10:14, 27; Genesis 18:19; Nahum 1:7; the relationship implied may involve remedial chastisement, Amos 3:2.

The same idea of appreciation as well as "knowledge" underlies several statements concerning the "knowledge" of God and His truth on the part of believers, (e.g., John 8:32; 14:20, 31; 17:3; Galatians 4:9 (1st part); 1 John 2:3, 13, 14; 4:6, 8, 16; 5:20);

such "knowledge" is obtained, not by mere intellectual activity, but by operation of the Holy Spirit consequent upon acceptance of Christ.

Nor is such "knowledge" marked by finality; see e.g., 2 Peter 3:18; Hosea 6:3"].

The second occurrence of *kardiognōstēs* is in Acts 15:8, and again it is the apostle Peter speaking, namely at the Apostles' Convent in Jerusalem, when they deliberated about the Gentiles and the Law of Moses:

"Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

And GOD, Which knoweth the hearts [*kardiognōstēs*], bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us;

And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith".

(Acts 15: 7-9, KJV).

Here the literal Greek is:

"The Heart-Knower God"

"*ho kardiognōstēs Theos*"

Note that it was on the basis of being THE "Heart-Knower God", that God

- bare "them" (the Gentiles) witness;
- put no difference between "us" (the believing Jews) and "them";
- purified the Gentiles' hearts *by faith*, and
- gave them *pneuma hagion* * namely "power from ON HIGH" – "*even as He did to us*" (the believing Jews).

* [Overwhelmingly the versions translate ""giving them The Holy Spirit", with capital letters.

It is true that in the Greek it is *to pneuma to hagion*, i.e. double definite article, which mostly refers to the Holy Spirit Himself. But not always.

The definite article is also used grammatically, referring back to identify the – in context - previously mentioned occasion regarding *pneuma hagion*.

This is clearly the case here, because:

(a) it is wholly un-scriptural to say that the Holy Spirit Himself is “given” (*didōmi*, which primarily means to give literally and concretely) to each believer, and

(b) the text itself makes the specific reference to a previous occasion:”...*even as He did to us*” – namely as recorded in Acts 2:4, which thereby also identifies that the Gentiles being given *pneuma* hagian in Acts 10:44, was the same gift as received by the believing Jews in Acts 2.

The text should therefore be understood as follows:

“**And GOD, Which knoweth the hearts** [*kardiognōstēs*], bare them witness,

giving THEM *the pneuma the holy one* [namely “that one previously given to *us*” (in Acts 2)]

EVEN AS He did UNTO US AND PUT NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN US AND THEM.

purifying their hearts by faith”].
