

The Doctrine of 'idôth (עֵדוֹת)¹

Introduction: 'idôth (עֵדוֹת) [pronounced *gih-DOHTH*] is one of those few words where its translation in the KJV is fairly consistent. It is generally rendered *testimonies*. What we will do in this doctrine is attempt to further narrow the meaning of this word.

Topics		
Pronunciation and Spelling	Meanings	An Examination of All Scriptural Occurrences
	Conclusion	
Charts, Maps and/or Doctrines		
	An Examination of All Scriptural Occurrences	

- Pronunciation and spelling:** 'idôth (עֵדוֹת) [pronounced *gih-DOHTH*]; this is the plural of 'êdâh (עֵדָה) [pronounced *gay-DAW*], which means *witness, testimony*. Strong's #5713 BDB #729 ('idôth is BDB #730).
- Meanings** already attributed to :
 - KJV renderings: *testimonies*.
 - Strong's renderings: properly *testimony, witness* (Strong's #5713)
 - BDB translations: *testimonies; [divine] testimonies, solemn charges* (BDB #730). BDB distinguish between the singular and plural usage of this noun. The definition of the singular is *testimony, witness*. There is no implication of divine involvement here.
 - Gesenius translations:
- Homonym:** To make things more complex, 'êdâh (עֵדָה) [pronounced *gay-DAW*] (this is the singular), also means *assembly, congregation, appointed meeting, a meeting, a crowd, a swarm [of bees]*. Strong's #5712 BDB #729. This usage is found in the singular approximately 100 passages (I don't believe it is found in the plural), whereas the singular of the word that we are studying is found only 4 times (Gen. 21:30 31:52 Joshua 24:27). 'êdâh is never found to mean *assembly, congregation* in the book of Genesis, but it is found used that way in other chapters of Joshua (chapters 9, 18, 20 and 22). This helps to explain why Strong assigned two different numbers to this word; and it helps to explain why BDB treated the singular and plural separately.
- Cognates:** There are actually a plethora of cognates for 'idôth.
 - The verbal cognate is gûwd (עוּד) [pronounced *good*], which means *to bear witness, to testify*. It is found primarily in the Hiphil. Strong's #5749 BDB #729.
 - There is the masculine noun 'êd (עֵד) [pronounced *gayde*], which means *witness, testimony, solemn testimony, evidence*. It is a word used outside the courtroom (Gen. 31:44 Ex. 22:13) and inside as well as in (Deut. 17:6–7, 19:18). Strong's #5707 BDB #729.
 - There is the feminine noun 'êdûwth (עֵדוּת) [pronounced *gay-DOOTH*], which means *a precept, law, revelation, testimony, witness*. This word properly means *that which is borne witness to* and is applied to revealed truth as that *which God bears witness to*. This term is used several times in reference to the decalogue (Ex. 31:18 32:15). This, when in conjunction with God's Laws, appears to be a synonym for His Laws or His Word. Strong's #5715 BDB #730.
- Passages:** Deut. 4:45 6:17, 20 Psalm 25:10 78:56 93:5 99:7 119:2, 22, 24, 46, 59, 79, 95, 119, 125, 138, 146, 152, 167, 168 132:12 You will notice that this is quite interesting; we find this noun used as a plural only in Deuteronomy and in the Psalms. We do not find it used in the rest of the Pentateuch. However, recall that

¹ Dude!

Moses probably edited but did not write Genesis; and the latter half of Exodus and all of Leviticus and Numbers are extended quotes from God.

6. **Hypothesis:** we might even render this as *the Words of God*, as His Words are the testimonies which God has given us throughout the years. He first spoke to us through His prophets, then through His Son, and finally through the Apostles; these *words* are His *testimonies*.

It may help us to get the fullest picture of the meaning of this word if we simply look at every passage where it is found:

An Examination of All Scriptural Occurrences of the Word

7. As you recall, Moses and the children of Israel stood on the brink of the Jordan River and were going to cross over; however, God was not going to allow Moses to cross over. So, the book of Deuteronomy is a summation of the Law of God, which inspired comments and additions by Moses. Deut. 5–26 is an extended speech by Moses to the children of Israel, going over the Law; it is introduced by these words: *Now, this is the law which Moses set before the sons of Israel; these are the testimonies, the statutes and the ordinances which Moses spoke to the sons of Israel when they came out of Egypt* (Deut. 4:44–45). What Moses was doing was giving a sermon over the things which God had told him. Moses had written these things down, and, no doubt, he had taught them before. My guess is, he probably read them to the Israelites. At this point, however, Moses gives what we might call *a sermon*; however, this is a sermon which is not devoid of content.
8. In Deut. 6, the theme might be stated as *obey God and prosper*. Within this chapter is the oft-quoted, *“Hear, O Israel! Jehovah is our Elohim; and Jehovah is one!”* (Duet. 6:4). Later, Moses tells the Israelites, *“You should diligently keep the commandments of Jehovah your God, and His testimonies and His statues, which He has commanded you.”* (Deut. 6:17).
9. We find this word used once more, and in conjunction with several similar Hebrew words (similar in meaning) in Deut. 6:20–21a: *“When your son asks you in the time to come, saying, ‘What about the testimonies and the statues and the judgments which Jehovah commanded you?’ Then you will say to your son...”* and the people are then to tell about what God did for them in Egypt.
10. Psalm 25 is a prayer by David to God. Midway through this prayer, David says: *All the paths of Jehovah are grace and truth to those who guard His covenant and His testimonies* (Psalm 25:10).
11. Psalm 78 is the divine interpretation of history, where God examines His relationship to Israel and recounts Israel’s many failures. After the entered into the land, the psalmist writes: *He [God] also drove out the nations before them, and He apportioned them for an inheritance by proportion, and He made the tribes of Israel live in their tents. Yet they tempted and rebelled against the Most High God and they did not keep His testimonies, but they turned back and acted treacherously like their fathers. They turned aside like a treacherous bow.* (Psalm 78:55–57). This, by the way, is the first occurrence of *ʿidôth* where it occurs by itself. Asaph wrote this psalm, making it one of the later psalms.
12. Psalm 93 is by an unknown author who praises God for His immutability, faithfulness and power. He closes the psalm with: *You testimonies are fully confirmed; holiness befits Your house, O Jehovah forevermore* (Psalm 93:5). Or, as we find in the HCSB: *LORD, Your testimonies are completely reliable; holiness is the beauty of Your house for all the days to come.* This passage, by the way, is the only time we do not find *testimonies*
13. We have our own passage, which reads: He spoke to the in the pillar of cloud. *They kept His testimonies, and the statute that He gave them* (Psalm 99:7).
14. This brings us to Psalm 119, where we find *ʿidôth* more often than anywhere else. This is the psalm of the death march, according to Bob Thieme, Jr. The Israelites with doctrine, when being taken out of Judah, thought this or wrote it.

An Examination of All Scriptural Occurrences of the Word

15. In the first section of Psalm 119, the author speaks of blessings or happiness for the believer; he writes: [How blessed are those who observe His *testimonies*](#) (Psalm 119:2). In this same context, the writer mentions statutes and commandments and judgments.

16. In the gimmel section, the writer speaks of those who obey God's laws and those who don't; he writes: [Take away reproach and contempt from me, for I observe Your *testimonies*. Even though princes sit and talk against me, Your servant meditates on Your statutes. Your *testimonies* also are my delight; they are my counselors](#) (Psalm 119:22–22).

17. Psalm 119:46 is interesting: [I will also speak of Your testimonies before kings and I will not be ashamed.](#)

18. The psalmist speaks of turning toward God: [I considered my ways and I turned my feet to Your *testimonies*](#) (Psalm 119:59).

19. [May those who fear You turn to me, even those who know Your *testimonies*](#) (Psalm 119:79). He expects to be helpful to those who are positive toward God's word.

20. [The wicked wait for me to destroy me; I will diligently consider Your *testimonies*](#) (Psalm 119:95).

21. [You have removed all the wicked of the earth; therefore, I love Your *testimonies*](#) (Psalm 119:119).

22. [I am Your servant; cause me to understand that I may know Your *testimonies*](#) (Psalm 119:125).

23. [You are righteous, O Jehovah, and upright are Your judgments. You have commanded Your *testimonies* in righteousness, and exceeding faithfulness](#) (Psalm 119:137–138).

24. [I cried with all my heart—answer me, O Jehovah! I will observe Your statutes. I cried to You; deliver me. And I will keep Your *testimonies*](#) (Psalm 119:145–146). Here, note that testimonies is more than simply a testimony as we think of it (e.g., in court). Here, the psalmist speaks of keeping or guarding God's testimonies.

25. [Of old, I have known Your *testimonies*; that You have founded them forever](#) (Psalm 119:152).

26. [I hope for Your deliverance, O Jehovah; and I do Your commandments. My soul keeps Your *testimonies* and I love them exceedingly. I keep Your precepts and Your *testimonies*, for all my ways are before You](#) (Psalm 119:166–168).

27. Psalm 132 is a look back to David and God's promises to him; again, *keeping* God's testimonies is an issue. [If your sons will keep My covenants and My *testimonies* which I will teach them, their sons will also sit upon your throne forever](#)" (Psalm 132:12; some English Bibles render *testimonies* in the singular here).

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28. Although some words are always found in conjunction with others, we find that only in Deuteronomy, in the few times this word occurs.
29. In Psalm 119, other words describing God's thinking are always nearby, even if not shown above.
30. We also find *testimonies* in conjunction with various words describing God's doctrine, in most of the psalms, but there is one exception, as noted above.
31. Notice that this word is always used of God; *testimonies* can always be traced almost directly to God in each and every passage.
32. **Conclusion:** Given what we have covered, *testimonies* is actually a very good rendering for this word. I know this seems like a long way to Tipperary, but now and again, when investigating the meaning of a word, we may come down to the conclusion that what the King James translators chose for a translation is the a good

rendering. Here, *testimonies* should be taken to be understood as referring to the *words of God*, not only as Moses first understood them (Moses seemed to function as a dictation secretary for much of the Pentateuch), but as *God's words* given by His prophets and His Apostles. Therefore, 'idôth means *testimonies, God's words, God's testimonies, the words of Scripture*. We might even get away with rendering this word the *Bible*.