

SPLANKNA – Deep Compassion

**Mat 9:36** R<sub>1</sub> Seeing G<sub>3708</sub> the N<sub>1</sub> people G<sub>3793</sub>, He felt G<sub>4697</sub> compassion G<sub>4697</sub> for them, R<sub>2</sub> because G<sub>3754</sub> they were N<sub>2</sub> distressed G<sub>4660</sub> and N<sub>3</sub> dispirited G<sub>4496</sub> like G<sub>5616</sub> sheep G<sub>4263b</sub> N<sub>4</sub> without G<sub>3361</sub> G<sub>2192</sub> a shepherd G<sub>4166</sub>.

**G4697** *σπλαγχνίζομαι* *splagchnizomai* *splangkhn-nid'-zom-ahee*  
Middle voice from G<sub>4698</sub>; to have the *bowels* yearn, that is, (figuratively) *feel sympathy, to pity*: - have (be moved with) compassion.

**Total KJV Occurrences:** 17 (MV... all are Jesus expressing compassion, or a parable Jesus tells which has the word compassion in it).

**compassion, 12**

Mat\_9:36, Mat\_14:14, Mat\_15:32, Mat\_18:27, Mat\_20:34, Mar\_1:41, Mar\_6:34, Mar\_8:2, Mar\_9:22, Luk\_7:13, Luk\_10:33, Luk\_15:20

**moved, 5**

Mat\_9:36, Mat\_14:14, Mat\_18:27, Mar\_1:41, Mar\_6:34

**Kittle Theological Wordbook of the New Testament**

*spláncnon/σπλάγχνον* [compassion],

*splanchnízomai/σπλαγχνίζομαι* [to have compassion],

*eúsplanchnos/εύσπλαχνος* [tender-hearted],

*polýsplanchnos/πολύσπλαχνος* [compassionate],

*ásplanchnos/άσπλαχνος* [merciless]

#### **A. Greek Usage.**

1. The Noun. Used mainly in the plural, the noun denotes the "inward parts" of a sacrifice, then the "sacrifice" itself, then the "inward parts" of the body, and finally the "womb" or "loins" (also in a derived sense "children"). In transferred usage the term denotes "impulsive passions" (anger, desire, etc.), then the "seat of feelings or sensibilities." There is, however, no developed transferred use, and in pre-Christian Greek the term does not denote pity or compassion.

2. The Verb. The verb means a. "to eat the inner parts" (of an offering) and b. "to use entrails in divination."

3. The Compounds. *ásplanchnos* occurs in the sense of "cowardly" ("with no guts") and *eusplanchnía* in the sense of "boldness." Cf. also *thrasýsplanchnos* for "fearless", and *kakósplanchnos* for "spiritless."

#### **B. Later Jewish Writings.**

1. The LXX. The noun and verb are rare in the LXX and seldom have Hebrew equivalents. The verb is used in the sacrificial sense in 2 Macc. 6:8. The noun (plural)

means "seat of feelings" in 2 Macc. 9:5-6 (cf. [Prov. 26:22](#); Sir. 30:7). The LXX uses the middle of the verb for "to be merciful" in [Prov. 17:5](#), while the noun denotes natural feelings in 4 Macc. 14:13.

2. Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.

a. **splánchna** occurs in these writings for "the center of feelings" or for "noble feelings" (cf. **splánchna eléous** for "loving mercy" in Test. Zeb. 7.3).

b. Once the verb denotes mere emotion but usually it refers to the inner disposition that leads to mercy.

c. **eúsplanchnos** and **eúsplanchnía** occur for the human virtue and disposition of "pity" in Test. Sim. 4.4; Benj. 4. 1.

d. The originally rather crude term **splanchnía** can thus be applied to God himself (cf. Test. Zeb. 8.2). It characterizes the divine nature relative to God's eschatological acts (Zeb. 9.7). In the Testaments of the Twelve **splánchna**, **splanchnízomai**, and **eúsplanchnos** replace the LXX **oiktirmoí**, **oiktirō**, and **oiktírmōn** and offer new renderings for Heb. **raḥam** etc.

3. Philo and Josephus. Philo mostly uses **splánchna** in a physiological sense, and the same is true of Josephus, in whom the references are often rather bloodthirsty.

### C. The NT.

1. **splanchnízomai** in the Synoptics.

a. The **verb** occurs in the NT only in the Synoptics. In three parables it denotes human attitudes. Thus in [Mt. 18:27](#) the lord has pity on the servant, in [Lk. 15:20](#) the father has compassion on the prodigal, and in [Lk. 10:33](#) the Samaritan has compassion on the man who has fallen among thieves. In all these instances the term reflects the totality of the divine mercy to which human compassion is a proper response.

b. Elsewhere in the Synoptics the verb has messianic significance, for it is only Jesus who shows compassion, as in [Mk. 1:42](#); [6:34](#); [8:2](#); [9:22](#); [Mt. 14:14](#); [20:34](#). In each case what we have is not so much the description of a human emotion as a messianic characterization. Cf. also [Lk. 7:13](#).

2. **splánchna** in Paul. Only the **noun** occurs in Paul, and he uses it not merely to express natural emotions but as a very forceful term to signify an expression of the total personality at the deepest level. Introduced in very personal passages, it is parallel to **kardía** in [2 Cor. 6:11-12](#), and to **pneúma** in [2 Cor. 7:13ff.](#) (Titus' deep love for the Corinthians). Twice in Philemon (vv. 7, 20) Paul refers to the refreshing of the **splánchna**, and in v. 12 he says that in Onesimus he is as it were coming in person with a claim for Philemon's love. In [Phil. 2:1](#) **splánchna kaí oiktirmoí** seems to be summing up the three preceding phrases. In context, then, **splánchna** denotes Christian affection and **oiktirmoí** Christian sympathy. Both are essential elements in all Christian dealings. A unique phrase occurs in [Phil. 1:8](#); the reference is to the love or affection which, gripping and moving the whole personality, is possible only in Christ; the genitive "of Christ" denotes the author (MV... i.e. the author of compassion is Christ).

3. The Rest of the NT. Apart from [Acts 1:18](#) ("entrails"), NT usage develops under the influence of Paul or later Judaism. [Col. 3:12](#) refers to a Christian virtue, [Lk. 1:78](#) has God's eschatological mercy in view, and [Jms. 5:11](#) also stands in an eschatological

context. In [1 Jn. 3:17](#) believers are not to close their hearts (the center of compassionate action) to the needy, and cf. the hortatory use of *εὐσπλάνχνος* in [Eph. 4:32](#); [1 Pet. 3:8](#).

#### **D. The Apostolic Fathers and Early Christian Writings.**

1. Only Ignatius Philadelphians 10.1 plainly reflects Pauline usage. In 1 Clem. 2.1 *σπλάνχνα* denotes the seat of religious conviction. God's mercy in eschatological salvation is the point in 2 Clem. 1.7, and the divine compassion in 1 Clem. 23.1.

2. The eschatological element in Testaments of the Twelve is adopted in Hermas; cf. especially the connection with the summons to repentance (Similitudes 8.11.1; 9.14.3).

3. *σπλάνχνα* and *εὐσπλάνχνια* are divine predicates in Acts of Thomas and Acts of John. The messianic use recurs, but in the latter the apostle has pity in the same way as Jesus in a usage that differs markedly from that of the NT.

[H. Köster, VII, 548-59]

→ *έλεος, οϊκτίρῶ*