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dictionary

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Language



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hear·ken also **har·ken**  (här kən)

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intr.v. **hear·kened**, **hear·ken·ing**, **hear·kens**

Archaic To listen attentively; give heed.

Phrasal Verb:

hearken back

Usage Problem To hark back.

[Middle English *herknen*, from Old English *hercnian*; see **kous-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

Usage Note: Traditionally, *hearken* means "to listen." The word has an archaic and formal air today, in part stemming from its extensive use in the King James Bible (as in Mark 7:14 "*Hearken unto me, every one of you*") and in traditional storytelling. In contemporary usage, *hearken* is more often used where one might expect *hark*, no doubt because of sound similarity: *The movie hearkens back to the sci-fi films of the 1950s*. The Usage Panel has mixed feelings about this. In our 2009 survey, just 48 percent accepted this example.

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Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

[Indo-European Roots](#)

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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