

Word Study of Proverbs 1 and 2 “Wisdom” חָכְמָה

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INTRODUCTION

The word “Torah” in Hebrew means “instruction.” Related to Proverbs, human wisdom is this *torah*, the expression for the wise man’s teachings. Similarly, חוכמה (“wisdom”) is in the human sense where Jewish sages (as in classical philosophy; one who has attained wisdom) later apprehend *torah* as the Torah of Moses and liken wisdom with this Torah. “With the book of Proverbs, we return to Wisdom literature. Proverbs does not have a narrative framework but rather sets forth, mainly in maxims and proverbial statements, the way of wisdom.”¹ Yet, a superficial examination of the book of Proverbs unveils that the question of education governs it. The call of the teacher directing his students echoes from its pages. A broad collection of subjects is presented, and various appeals summon the pupil to listen and regard the guidance from the teacher.

This matter, nevertheless, appears for the most part without order or sequence that is distinguishable. A great deal of Proverbs consists of arbitrary numbers of sayings. The student recognizes various components, but the issue as a whole persists as unclear. Consequently, this thesis attempts to integrate the meaning of wisdom as it relates to יראת יהוה in the book of Proverbs into a more systematic statement of the method that underlies its teachings.

I. GENERIC USAGE OF יראת יהוה (HISTORICAL/DIACHRONIC/SCRIPTURAL)

In expressions of etymology, the phrase יראת is transliterated *yir'â*, (Strong’s 3374). It’s historical use from a primitive root meaning ירָא (H3373), is fear (of God), respect, reverence, and piety—occurring 41 times in Scripture. The etymology of יהוה is transliterated *Y^hhōvâ*, (Strong’s 3068). It’s historical use from a primitive root meaning הָוָה (H1961), is the proper name of the one true God, יהוה *Y^hhōvâh*, yeh-ho-vaw'; from H1961; (the) self-Existent

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King and His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 280.

or Eternal; Jeho-vah, Jewish national name of God: —Jehovah, the Lord²—occurring 6,510 times in Scripture.

The usage of יהוה refers to God as “LORD”, his covenantal, personal name and observes the creation through the lens of Israel’s covenant values. This observance is a component of the international tradition of wisdom literature, characterized by secularity—it focuses on the world of nature (Proverbs 30:18-19), as well as human behavior, and experience (Proverbs 24:30-34; 4:1-9). Though not a brand of natural theology, these implications are in contrast to materials of the Pentateuch and the Prophets. “This unity of thought with the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures, however, is not demonstrated by explicit reference to prescriptions of the law or the acts of salvation history.”³

II. CONTEXTUAL SETTING AND EXEGETICAL MEANING

The contextual setting of Proverbs 1 and the fundamental use of יהוה is an expression associated with the act of one receiving חוכמה as the anchor and means of one’s life, the proverbial basic presupposition as well as prerequisite for its acquisition. It is a character fostered in relationship with God. “The book of Proverbs is not a secular work, for in Israel no realm of life was secular, for ‘the teachers were completely unaware of any reality not controlled by Yahweh.’”⁴

Proverbs 2 is the antithesis of those that discard חוכמה and in their waywardness refuse יהוה rejecting it by snubbing the moral benefits of wisdom. “David’s assertion, that ‘the

² Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: *A Reader’s Edition* (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 2014), 1362. Examination of Proverbs 1 for comparison of יהוה word study analysis.

³ Daniel Estes, *Hear My Son: Teaching & Learning in Proverbs 1-9*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 21.

⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King and His Beauty*, 281.

fool hath said in his heart, there is no God,' is primarily, as we shall soon see in another place, to be restricted to those who extinguish the light of nature, and willfully stupefy themselves.”⁵

Related to חוכמה is the theological viewpoint on life as well as the means to ascertain truth concerning God in the world. A fool is a simpleton who is morally defective and depicted by irrational conduct. Both of these thoughts on both Proverbs 1 and 2 propositions on the one hand (1) the way of wisdom and life, and (2) on the other, the way of folly and death—יִרְאַת יְהוָה offers both wisdom and instruction. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” Proverbs 1:7.

III. CONCLUSION

“One can argue for an ethical understanding of the fear of the LORD from the general tenor of wisdom admonitions, and from the parallelism between חכמה and צדיק , or the antithesis between חכמה and רשע. The fear of YHWH takes on a more intellectual meaning, as a gift which illuminates man's intelligence.”⁶

With the development of human wisdom, יִרְאַת יְהוָה becomes the awareness of what God wants and does. This fear corresponds to the knowledge of the LORD (Proverbs 2:5). Fear of God effectively saves people from sin in secret acts and in areas where the law does not apply. This lesson teaches people to be humble, to believe in God, to perform worship duties, and to obey God's commands.

⁵ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book I, Chapter IV, II (Philadelphia, PA: Nicklin and Howe, 1816), 55.

⁶ Henri Blocher, “The Fear of the Lord as the ‘Principle’ of Wisdom, *The Tyndale Biblical Theology Lecture*, 28, (1977) 3-28.

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