

THE USE OF THE PHRASE, “*THE FEAR OF THE LORD*” IN PROVERBS

The “**fear of the Lord**” is the most basic truth found in the book of Proverbs. As one can see from reading the references, unless one has “**fear of the Lord**” he will not have any wisdom, knowledge or understanding. Also, when we look at the collection of verses concerning “**the fool,**” we see that the “**fear of the Lord**” is critical if one is not to become a “fool.”

This “**fear of the Lord**” was learned in association with God’s Law as is stated in Deuteronomy 31:11-12 and other passages. While the modern emphasis is upon translating this Hebrew word as “**reverence,**” that is only a result of the meaning of this word. It’s basic idea is “**fear**” or “**terror.**” Such an attitude towards God recognizes that blessings flow from “**fearing the Lord**” and curses result from not “**fearing the Lord.**”

It is clear that, if a person desires to have a full and meaningful life and receive the blessings God has for him, he will develop a “**fear of the Lord**” and live according to the Lord’s instructions.

Strong’s Lexicon (*Definitions copied from Strong’s Lexicon*)

3374 From 3373; TWOT 907b; GK 3711; 45 occurrences; AV translates as “fear” 41 times, “exceedingly + 1419” twice, “dreadful” once, and “fearfulness” once. 1 fear, terror, fearing. 1A fear, terror. 1B awesome or terrifying thing (object causing fear). 1c fear (of God), respect, reverence, piety. 1D revered.

Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT) (*Definitions copied from TWOT*)

In this discussion, biblical usages of the Hebrew word are divided into five general categories: 1) the emotion of fear, 2) the intellectual anticipation of evil without emphasis upon the emotional reaction, 3) reverence or awe, 4) righteous behaviour or piety, and 5) formal religious worship. Major OT synonyms include several words referring to shaking or quaking as a result of fear.

In several passages, “**fearing**” and **proper living** are so closely related as to be virtually synonymous ideas (Lev 19:14; 25:17; II Kgs 17:34; Deut 17:19). It is plausible that this usage of “**to fear**” as a virtual synonym for righteous living or piety grew out of viewing “fear”—in any of the senses above—as the motivation which produced righteous living. **This practical, active fear is the kind of fear** for which God rewarded the Egyptian midwives (Ex 1:17, 21). This kind of fear was most appropriately learned by reading the Law (Deut 31:11–12). One righteous deed repeatedly and emphatically associated with “**fearing**” God is kindness to the stranger or resident alien (e.g. Deut 10:18–20; 25:18).

There are a few passages in which “**fearing**” seems to mean “**being a devotee or follower.**” This usage could reflect either usages 4 or 5 above. Possible verbal examples are found in Job 1:9 and II Chr 6:33.

Fear of various sorts may be caused by God’s great deeds (Ex 14:31; Josh 4:23–24; I Sam 4:7–9), by judgment (Isa 59:18–19), and God’s law (Deut 4:10) as well as by various human agencies (I Sam 7:7; 15:24)

The “**God-fearer**” will implement his fear in practical righteousness or piety. Job, as a God fearer, avoids evil (Job 1:1). In Ps 128:1 the “**fearer**” of the Lord walks in his ways. The fear-ers of the Lord may be those whose particular piety is evidenced by a response to God’s message. The “**fearer**” of God is contrasted with the wicked (Eccl 8:13). It is desired that office holders be fearers of God (Neh 7:2). Blessings are provided for fearers of God: **happiness** (i.e. “**blessed**”; Ps 112:1), **goodness from God** (Ps 31:19), **provision of needs** (Ps 34:9), **protection** (Ps 33:18–19, **overshadowing mercy** (Ps 103:11), and **promise of fulfilled desires** (Ps 145:19)

“**The fear of the Lord**” may refer to the emotion of terror or fear (Ps 55:5; Ezk 30:13). **This terror may be put into men’s hearts by God** (Ex 20:20; Deut 2:25). Isaiah 7:25 uses the term for an unemotional anticipation of evil. **When God is the object of fear, the emphasis is again upon awe or reverence. This attitude of reverence is the basis for real wisdom** (Job 28:28; Ps 110:10; Prov 9:10; 15:33). Indeed, the phrase sets the theme for the book of Proverbs. It is used in 1:7; recurs in 9:10 and thirteen other verses. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil (8:13), is a fountain of life (14:27), it tendeth to life (19:23), and prolongeth days (10:27). **Numerous passages relate this fear of God to piety and righteous living: it motivates faithful living** (Jer 32:40). Fear of God results in caring for strangers (Gen 20:11). Just rule is rule in the fear of God (II Sam 23:3). Fear of the Almighty does not withhold kindness from friends (Job 6:14). Economic abuses against fellow Jews were contrary to the fear of God (Neh 5:9). The fear of the Lord turns men from evil (Prov 16:6).

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“Fear of the Lord” can be found fifteen times in the book of Proverbs as well as numerous other references in the Old Testament. We will study the fifteen times “fear of the Lord” is used in the book of Proverbs. You will notice that, as the verses are printed out for our use, they will have “Strong’s numbers” marked over a number of words in the verses. These will be included for those who desire to delve deeply into the meaning of what God is telling us. Later, in our study of Proverbs, we will consider the meanings and uses of the words which you find numbered in our study. It is hoped that, after learning the process we will use it to study the use of “fear of the Lord” in Proverbs that some may wish to follow the same process and study the other uses in other Old Testament books.

One way these verses can be organized into a structure for understanding is as follows:

DEFINITION OF “FEAR OF THE LORD”

Proverbs 1:7 The fear³³⁷⁴ of the LORD³⁰⁶⁸ is the beginning of knowledge¹⁸⁴⁷: but fools¹⁹¹ despise wisdom²⁴⁵¹ and instruction⁴¹⁴⁸.

Proverbs 9:10 The fear³³⁷⁴ of the LORD³⁰⁶⁸ is the beginning of wisdom²⁴⁵¹: and **the knowledge¹⁸⁴⁷ of the holy⁶⁹¹⁸ is understanding⁹⁹⁸**.

Proverbs 15:33 The fear³³⁷⁴ of the LORD³⁰⁶⁸ is the instruction⁴¹⁴⁸ of wisdom²⁴⁵¹; and before honour is humility.

Proverbs 8:13 The fear³³⁷⁴ of the LORD³⁰⁶⁸ is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate ^{<8130>}.

HOW TO ACQUIRE “FEAR OF THE LORD”

Proverbs 2:5 Then shalt thou understand¹⁹⁹⁵ the fear³³⁷⁴ of the LORD³⁰⁶⁸, and find the knowledge of God.

Proverbs 3:7 Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear³³⁷² the LORD³⁰⁶⁸, and depart from evil.

BENEFITS OF THE “FEAR OF THE LORD”

Proverbs 10:27 The fear³³⁷⁴ of the LORD³⁰⁶⁸ longeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.

Proverbs 14:26 In the fear³³⁷⁴ of the LORD³⁰⁶⁸ is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge.

Proverbs 14:27 The fear³³⁷⁴ of the LORD³⁰⁶⁸ is a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death.

Proverbs 15:16 Better is little with the fear³³⁷⁴ of the LORD³⁰⁶⁸ than great treasure and trouble therewith.

Proverbs 16:6 By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear³³⁷⁴ of the LORD³⁰⁶⁸ men depart from evil.

Proverbs 19:23 The fear³³⁷⁴ of the LORD³⁰⁶⁸ tendeth to life and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.

Proverbs 22:4 By humility and the fear³³⁷⁴ of the LORD³⁰⁶⁸ are riches, and honour, and life

DESCRIPTION OF “FOOLS”

Proverbs 1:29 For that they hated ⁸¹³⁰ knowledge ¹⁸⁴⁷, and did not choose ⁹⁷⁷ the fear³³⁷⁴ of the LORD³⁰⁶⁸.

ADMONITION

Proverbs 23:17 Let not thine heart envy sinners : but be thou in the fear³³⁷⁴ of the LORD³⁰⁶⁸ all the day long.

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Proverbs 1:29 For that they hated ^{<8130>} knowledge ^{<1847>}, and did not choose ^{<977>} the fear ^{<3374>} of the LORD:

1. “What does this statement say?”

2. “How does this statement relate to the other statements I have located pertaining to this topic?”

3. “How does this statement apply to my life?”

4. “What does God want me to do as a result of reading this statement?”

5. “What will I resolve to do as a result of what I have learned from this statement?”

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Proverbs 10:27 The fe^{<3374>}ar of the LORD prolongeth ^{<3254>} days ^{<3117>}; but the years of the wicked ^{<7563>} shall be shortened.

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Proverbs 22:4 By humility ^{<6038>} and the **fear** ^{<3374>} **of the LORD** are riches ^{<6239>}, and honour ^{<3519>}, and life ^{<2416>}.

1. “What does this statement say?”
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