

WISDOM AND RELATED WORDS***A study of what God has to say in Proverbs and the Old Testament about "Wisdom."*****hokmah** 2451

Our study of "wisdom" and related words in the Old Testament begins with and is based upon the following passage which Solomon wrote to his son, Jeroboam, desiring that he would acquire skill in righteous living and be prepared to be his successor upon the throne of Judah. It appears that Solomon wrote these Proverbs when he was still a young man and his son just a child for we know, from Solomon's writings in Ecclesiastes, the book of his old age, that, even though he was extremely wise and blessed by God, he did not apply many of these Proverbs to his own life. Even so, what we find in these first verses of Proverbs is so rich in meaning and guidance that God surely inspired and dictated these very words.

Twelve different words found in the following verses will be the focus of our study:

The Proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;

To know **WISDOM**²⁴⁵¹

and **INSTRUCTION**;⁴¹⁴⁸

to **PERCEIVE**⁹⁹⁵ the words of **UNDERSTANDING**;⁹⁹⁸

To receive the **INSTRUCTION**⁴¹⁴⁸

of **WISDOM**,⁷⁹¹⁹ **JUSTICE**,⁶⁶⁶⁴ and **JUDGMENT**,⁴⁹⁴¹ and **EQUITY**,⁴³³⁹

To give **SUBTLETY**⁶¹⁹⁵ to the simple,

to the young man **KNOWLEDGE**¹⁸⁴⁷ and **DISCRETION**.⁴²⁰⁹

*A wise man will hear, and will increase **LEARNING**;³⁹⁴⁸ and a man of **UNDERSTANDING**⁹⁹⁵ shall attain unto wise counsels: To understand a Proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.*

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of **KNOWLEDGE**;¹⁸⁴⁷*

*but fools despise **WISDOM**²⁴⁵¹ and **INSTRUCTION**⁴¹⁴⁸*

(Proverbs 1:1-7).

The first word we shall focus on is **wisdom**²⁴⁵¹ which is used in both verse two and seven. Appearing 149 times in 141 verses, this is one of the most important words in all of the Old Testament. In our study we shall first consider its 39 uses in Proverbs because, in those statements, we will discover some attributes of the word which will assist us in defining it and which we will then see how it is applied when we study its uses in the remainder of the Old Testament. As we study these words we will first consider the definition provided by the **Strong's**. Next we will consider the definition Provided by the **TWOT**. Following these two steps we will consider each place God has used this Hebrew word in the Old Testament, starting with the book of Proverbs. Emphasis has been given to certain important phrases extracted from the TWOT by using bold, italics and/or color.

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2451 – [*chokmah* /khok·maw/] This word is a feminine noun from **2449**; TWOT 647a; There are 149 occurrences in the Old Testament. The KJV translates it as "*wisdom*" 145 times, "*wisely*" twice, "*skilful man*" once, and "*wits*" once. **Outline of Biblical Usage:** 1 wisdom. 1A skill (in war). 1B wisdom (in administration). 1C shrewdness, wisdom. 1D wisdom, prudence (in religious affairs). 1E wisdom (ethical and religious). [Since 2451 is derived from 2449 that definition is provided below.]

2449 – [*chakam* /khaw·kam/] This word is a verb and a primitive root; TWOT 647; There are 27 occurrences of this verb in the Old Testament and the KJV translates IT as "wise" 19 times, "wiser" four times, "wisely" twice, "teach wisdom" once, and "exceeding" once. **Outline of Biblical Usage:** 1 to be wise. 1A (Qal: this verb expresses simple action) to be or become wise, act wisely. 1B (Piel: this verb expresses "intensive action") to make wise, teach wisdom, instruct. 1C (Pual: this is the passive of Piel) to be made wise. 1D (Hiphil: this verb form expresses a causative action such as "causing someone to do something) to make wise. 1E (Hithpael: this verb form expresses a "reflexive action" such as one doing something to oneself) to show oneself wise, deceive, show one's wisdom.

TWOT**647a** *hokmâ* *wisdom*.

The verb is used twenty-six times and most of the passages appear in the Qal stem meaning "be wise," etc. In the Piel stem the meaning is "making wise" or "teaching." Of all the words denoting intelligence, the most frequently used are this verb and its derivatives, which occur some 312 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. About three-fifths of the usages are found in Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.

The essential idea of hokam represents a manner of thinking and attitude concerning life's experiences, including matters of general interest and basic morality. These concerns relate to prudence in secular affairs, skills in the arts, moral sensitivity, and experience in the ways of the Lord.

The subject wisdom was discussed throughout the ancient near east. Mesopotamian wisdom, which originated with the Sumerian, emphasized human experiences, character, and counsel regarding practical advice. The Proverbs of death and suffering were discussed. Egyptian wisdom included the concept of ma'at ("truth," "intelligence," "justice"), according to which one order existed in the whole universe. J. A. Wilson characterizes it as a created and inherited rightness, which tradition built up into an orderly stability (The Culture of Ancient Egypt, University of Chicago, 1951, p. 48). men were subject to this order of conduct, which was taught by the priests. Some have felt that much of the Old Testament royal wisdom, which great leaders imparted to their students, was borrowed from Egyptian wisdom (e.g. Proverbs 23:13f. borrowed from the teachings of Amenemope, although it is more likely that an original source reflects a revelation of wisdom.) Ugaritic literature also has a form of maxims concerning the father-son relationship possibly reflecting Canaanite wisdom. A later Arabic derivative of the verb denotes "to restrain from acting in an evil manner."

The wisdom of the Old Testament however, is quite distinct from other ancient world views, although the format of wisdom literature is similar to that of other cultures. Reflected in OLD TESTAMENT wisdom is the teaching of a personal God who is holy and just and who expects those who know him to exhibit his character in the many practical affairs of life.

This perfect blend of the revealed will of a holy God with the practical human experiences of life is also distinct from the speculative wisdom of the Greeks. The ethical dynamic of Greek philosophy

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lay in the intellect; if a person had perfect knowledge he could live the good life (Plato). Knowledge was virtue. The emphasis of OLD TESTAMENT wisdom was that the human will, in the realm of practical matters, was to be subject to divine causes. ***Therefore, Hebrew wisdom was not theoretical and speculative, It was practical, based on revealed principles of right and wrong, to be lived out in daily life.***

In the historical and prophetic books, the word **hokma** is sometimes used just to refer to ordinary intelligence and skill (Exodus 35:35; Daniel 1:4), but even there sometimes the divine and moral wisdom is in view.

The wisdom literature, while sometimes using wisdom as prudence and cleverness, majors on ethical and spiritual conduct. Because God revealed himself to Israel, their sacred literature has the effect of a divine imperative; **hokam** refers to godly cleverness and skill, which results in practical action. The one who hears (Proverbs 8:33; 23:19; 27:11), will be industrious, will know how to talk, and his will, will be in captivity to God's will. He will have life. This wins divine approbation.

The usages of **hokam** cover the whole gamut of human experience. Wisdom is seen in the skill of technical work in making garments for the high priest (Exodus 28:3), craftsmanship in metal work (Exodus 31:3-6), as well as the execution of battle tactics (Isaiah 10:13). Wisdom is required from government leaders and heads of state for administration (Deuteronomy 34:9; II Samuel 14:20), including pagan leaders as well as Israelites (Ezekiel 28:4-5).

Wisdom is expressed in shrewdness. The woman of Tekoa averted a town's bloodshed in her clever plea for its safety (II Samuel 20:22). But a shrewd person is not to boast of his gift (Jeremiah 9:23). The ostrich displays traits lacking shrewdness when she acts in her silly selfish manner (Job 39:17). The gift of shrewdness can be used in an ungodly way to deny the omniscience of God (Isaiah 47:10).

Prudence, an aspect of wisdom, is expressed by those who speak with wisdom (Psalm 37:30; Proverbs 10:31), and who use time carefully (Psalm 90:12). This kind of wisdom in the practical affairs of life is derived from the revelation of God (Isaiah 33:6).

The source of all wisdom is a personal God who is holy, righteous, and just. His wisdom is expressed against the background of his omnipotence and omniscience. By his wisdom God numbered the clouds (Job 38:37), founded the earth (Proverbs 3:19), and made the world (Jeremiah 10:12). Wisdom, being found in God, is regarded as a divine attribute (Job 12:13). He alone knows wisdom in its truest sense (Job 28:20). The wisdom of God is not found in man's speculation. He alone must provide this wisdom for man's guidance so that man can live the best possible moral and ethical life (Proverbs 2:6; Job 11:6).

In Proverbial fashion, the Bible personifies divine wisdom so that it seems to be a hypostasis of God, but stops just short of giving it separate existence. This wisdom was brought forth before all things (Proverbs 8:22-31). She has built a house and prepared a banquet for those who will listen to her (Proverbs 9:1f.). She even teaches in public places (Proverbs 1:20; 8:1, 6, 11-12). By her instruction the naive become wise, politicians become wise, and those who receive from her wealth are crowned with honor and riches (Proverbs 8:1-21).

This personification of wisdom is unique. While there were gods and goddesses in the ancient near east who were thought to possess the gifts of wisdom it is unlikely that any existed by the name of wisdom. The figure of wisdom in the Old Testament never came to be regarded as a deity independent of the Lord although some such expressions occur in Proverbs 8. These have often been taken as an adumbration of Christ. Wisdom did attain a degree of personification, with features which were by no means abstract. Wisdom should not be regarded as God but it does belong to God; it is one of his

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attributes. Wisdom has a personal existence in the living word of the New Testament, but wisdom is not the Logos herself (Delitzsch, Proverbs, p. 183). That Wisdom is personified as a woman in Proverbs 1–9 is partly explained by the fact that the noun is feminine. There the Lady Wisdom is contrasted with the woman Folly who is personified sin. Note the studied contrast of Proverbs 9:4–6 and 9:16–18. This personification of wisdom is not found outside these chapters.

Wisdom for man is not only to make one humanly wise, but also to lead him to fear the Lord, for this is the beginning of all wisdom (Job 28:28). True wisdom for man involves knowing the Holy One. So, men are to listen to the wisdom of God with attentive ears (Proverbs 2:2). In fact, inner happiness only comes when man attains this wisdom (Proverbs 3:13) through a strenuous search (Proverbs 2:4), which is actually a search for God himself (Proverbs 2:5). Skeptics will never find this wisdom and will never know the full meaning of life (Proverbs 14:6f.). In the great poem of Job 28 wisdom in this special biblical sense is practically defined as trust in God and the avoidance of sin.

Proverbs 1:2 To know **WISDOM** and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise **WISDOM** and instruction.

Proverbs 2:2 So that thou incline thine ear unto **WISDOM**, and apply thine heart to understanding;

Proverbs 2:6 For the Lord giveth **WISDOM**: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.

Proverbs 2:10 When **WISDOM** entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul;

Proverbs 3:13 Happy is the man that findeth **WISDOM**, and the man that getteth understanding.

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Proverbs 3:19 The Lord by **WISDOM** hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens.

Proverbs 4:5 Get **WISDOM**, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth.

Proverbs 4:7 **WISDOM** is the principal thing; therefore get **WISDOM**: and with all thy getting get understanding.

Proverbs 4:11 I have taught thee in the way of **WISDOM**; I have led thee in right paths.

Proverbs 5:1 My son, attend unto my **WISDOM**, and bow thine ear to my understanding:

Proverbs 7:4 Say unto **WISDOM**, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman:

Proverbs 8:1 Doth not **WISDOM** cry? and understanding put forth her voice?

Proverbs 8:11 For **WISDOM** is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.

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Proverbs 8:12 I **WISDOM** dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions.

Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of **WISDOM**: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

Proverbs 10:13 In the lips of him that hath understanding **WISDOM** is found: but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding.

Proverbs 10:23 It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath **WISDOM**.

Proverbs 10:31 The mouth of the just bringeth forth **WISDOM**: but the froward tongue shall be cut out.

Proverbs 11:2 When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is **WISDOM**.

Proverbs 13:10 Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is **WISDOM**.

Proverbs 14:6 A scorner seeketh **WISDOM**, and findeth it not: but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth.

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Proverbs 14:8 The **WISDOM** of the prudent is to understand his way: but the folly of fools is deceit.

Proverbs 14:33 **WISDOM** resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding: but that which is in the midst of fools is made known.

Proverbs 15:33 The fear of the Lord is the instruction of **WISDOM**; and before honor is humility.

Proverbs 16:16 How much better is it to get **WISDOM** than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!

Proverbs 17:16 Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get **WISDOM**, seeing he hath no heart to it?

Proverbs 17:24 **WISDOM** is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.

Proverbs 18:4 The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of **WISDOM** as a flowing brook.

Proverbs 21:30 There is no **WISDOM** nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord.

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Proverbs 23:23 Buy the truth, and sell it not; also **WISDOM**, and instruction, and understanding.

Proverbs 24:3 Through **WISDOM** is a house builded; and by understanding it is established:

Proverbs 24:14 So shall the knowledge of **WISDOM** be unto thy soul: when thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off.

Proverbs 28:26 He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh **WISELY**, he shall be delivered.

Proverbs 29:3 Whoso loveth **WISDOM** rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance.

Proverbs 29:15 The rod and reproof give **WISDOM**: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.

Proverbs 30:3 I neither learned **WISDOM**, nor have the knowledge of the holy.

Proverbs 31:26 She openeth her mouth with **WISDOM**; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.