

## Wisdom

### Wisdom and Understanding

#### WISDOM WISE, SKILLED A. Adjective.

chakam OT:2450, "wise; skillful; practical." This word plus the noun chakemah and the verb "to be wise" signify an important element of the Old Testament religious point of view. Religious experience was not a routine, a ritual, or faith experience. It was viewed as a mastery of the art of living in accordance with God's expectations. In their definition, the words "mastery" and "art" signify that wisdom was a process of attainment and not an accomplishment. The secular usage bears out the importance of these observations.

Chakam appears 132 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. It occurs most frequently in Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, for which reason these books are known as "wisdom literature". The first occurrence of chakam is in Gen 41:8: "And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh."

The chakam in secular usage signified a man who was a "skillful" craftsman. The manufacturers of the objects belonging to the tabernacle were known to be wise, or experienced in their crafts Ex 36:4. Even the man who was skillful in making idols was recognized as a craftsman Isa 40:20; cf. Jer 10:9.

The reason for this is to be found in the man's skill, craftsmanship, and not in the object which was being manufactured. Those who were experienced in life were known as "wise," but their wisdom is not to be confused with the religious usage. Cleverness and shrewdness characterized this type of wisdom. Amnon consulted Jonadab, who was known as a shrewd man 2 Sam 13:3, and followed his plan of seducing his sister Tamar. Joab hired a "wise" woman to make David change his mind about Absalom 2 Sam 14:2.

Based on the characterization of wisdom as a skill, a class of counselors known as "wise men" arose. They were to be found in Egypt Gen 41:8, in Babylon Jer 50:35, in Tyre Ezek 27:9, in Edom Obad 8, and in Israel. In pagan cultures the "wise" man practiced magic and divination: "Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments" Ex 7:11; and "...that frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish" Isa 44:25.

The religious sense of chakom excludes delusion, craftiness, shrewdness, and magic. God is the source of wisdom, as He is "wise": "Yet he also is wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back his words: but will arise against the house of the evildoers, and against the help of them that work iniquity" Isa 31:2. The man or woman who, fearing God, lives in accordance with what God expects and what is expected of him in a God-fearing society is viewed as an integrated person. He is "wise" in that his manner of life projects the fear of God and the blessing of God rests upon him. Even as the craftsman is said to be skillful in his trade, the Old Testament chakam was learning and applying wisdom to every situation in life, and the degree in which he succeeded was a barometer of his progress on the road of wisdom.

The opposite of the chakam is the "fool" or wicked person, who stubbornly refuses counsel and depends on his own understanding: "For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them" Prov 1:32; cf. Deut 32:5-6; Prov 3:35.

#### B. Noun.

chokmah OT:2451, "wisdom; experience; shrewdness." This word appears 141 times in the Old Testament. Like chakam, most occurrences of this word are in Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. The chakam seeks after chokmah, "wisdom." Like chakam, the word chokmah can refer to technical skills or special abilities in fashioning something. The first occurrence of chokmah is in Ex 28:3: "And thou shalt speak unto all that are wisehearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office." This first occurrence of the word in the Hebrew Bible bears this out as well as the

description of the workers on the tabernacle. The artisan was considered to be endowed with special abilities given to him by God: "And he hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship" Ex 35:31.

Chokmah is the knowledge and the ability to make the right choices at the opportune time. The consistency of making the right choice is an indication of maturity and development. The prerequisite for "wisdom" is the fear of the Lord: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" Prov 1:7. "Wisdom" is viewed as crying out for disciples who will do everything to pursue her Prov 1:20. The person who seeks chokmah diligently will receive understanding: "For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding" Prov 2:6; he will benefit in his life by walking with God: "That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous" Prov 2:20. The advantages of "wisdom" are many: "For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: so shalt thou find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man" Prov 3:2-4. The prerequisite is a desire to follow and imitate God as He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, without self-reliance and especially not in a spirit of pride: "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding 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: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" Prov 1:5-7. The fruits of chokmah are many, and the Book of Proverbs describes the characters of the chakam and chokmah. In New Testament terms the fruits of "wisdom" are the same as the fruits of the Holy Spirit; cf. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" Gal 5:22-23; "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" James 3:17-18. The importance of "wisdom" explains why books were written about it. Songs were composed in celebration of "wisdom" Job 28. Even "wisdom" is personified in Proverbs. Chokmah as a person stands for that divine perfection of "wisdom" which is manifest in God's creative acts. As a divine perfection it is visible in God's creative acts: "Doth not wisdom cry: and understanding put forth her voice?... I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions.... The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.... Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.... Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways" Prov 8:1,12,22,30,32. The Septuagint translations are: sophos ("clever; skillful; experienced; wise; learned"); phronimos ("sensible; thoughtful; prudent; wise"); and sunetos ("intelligent; sagacious; wise"). The KJV gives these translations: "wise; wise man; cunning."

C. Verb.

chakam OT:2449, "to be wise, act wisely, make wise, show oneself wise." This root, which occurs 20 times in the Old Testament, appears in other Semitic languages, such as in the Akkadian word chakamu. The word means "to be wise" in Prov 23:15: "My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine." In Ps 119:98 chakam means "to make wise": "Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me." (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

## UNDERSTANDING TO SEE, PERCEIVE

A. Verb.

ra'ah OT:7200, "to see, observe, perceive, get acquainted with, gain understanding, examine, look after (see to), choose, discover." This verb occurs only in Moabite and all periods of Hebrew. It appears in the Bible about 1,300 times.

Basically ra'ah connotes seeing with one's eyes: Isaac's "eyes were dim, so that he could not see" Gen 27:1. This is its meaning in Gen 1:4, its first biblical appearance. The word can be used in the sense of seeing only what is obvious: "...for the Lord seeth not as man seeth..." 1 Sam 16:7. This verb can also mean "to observe": "...and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport" Judg 16:27. The second primary meaning is "to perceive," or to be consciously aware of-- so idols "neither see, nor hear" Deut 4:28. Third, ra'ah can represent perception in the sense of hearing something-- God brought the animals before Adam "to see what he would call them" Gen 2:19. In Isa 44:16 the verb means "to enjoy": "...I am warm, I have seen the fire." It can also mean "to realize" or "to get acquainted with": "When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth..." Eccl 8:16. The rebellious men of Jerusalem tell God they will not "see sword nor famine"; they will not experience it Jer 5:12. This verb has several further extended meanings. For example, ra'ah can refer to "perceiving or ascertaining" something apart from seeing it with one's eyes, as when Hagar saw that she had conceived Gen 16:4. It can represent mentally recognizing that something is true: "We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee..." Gen 26:28. Seeing and hearing together can mean "to gain understanding": "...kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider" Isa 52:15. In Mal 3:18 the verb means "to distinguish": "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked...."

The word can mean to consider the fact that Israel is God's people Ex 33:13.

In addition to these uses of ra'ah referring to intellectual seeing, there is seeing used in the sense of living. "To see the light" is to live life Job 3:16; cf. 33:28. It can mean "experience" in the sense of what one is aware of as he lives: "Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity... reap the same" Job 4:8. In 2 Kings 25:19 the verb is used in the unique sense of "having trusted concourse with" when it speaks of the five advisors of the king.

A fourth idea of seeing is "to examine": "And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower..."

Gen 11:5. This examining can have to do with more than looking something over; it can refer to looking after or supervising something Gen 39:23. Used in this sense ra'ah can imply looking upon with joy or pain. Hagar asked that she not be allowed to look on the death of Ishmael Gen 21:16. This verb may be used of attending to or visiting-- so Jonadab said to Amnon: "...when thy father cometh to see thee, say unto him..." 2 Sam 13:5. When Joseph advised Pharaoh "to look out a man discreet and wise," he was telling him to choose or select such a man Gen 41:33. "To examine" may also be "to observe" someone in order to imitate what he does Judg 7:17, or "to discover" something (find it out; Judg 16:5).

#### B. Nouns.

ro'eh OT:7203, "seer; vision." Ro'eh, which occurs 11 times, refers to a "prophet" (emphasizing the means by which revelation was received; 1 Sam 9:9) and to "vision" Isa 28:7.

Several other nouns are related to the verb ra'ah. Re'i appears once to mean "looking-glass" Job 37:18. Ro'i, which occurs 4 times, means "looking, appearance" 1 Sam 16:12, NASB. Re'ut occurs once, and it means "look" Eccl 5:11. Mar'ah means "visionary appearance" or "(prophetic) vision" Gen 46:2 and "looking glasses" Ex 38:8; this word appears 12 times. Of its 15 occurrences the noun to'ar means "form, shape" in 1 Sam 28:14 and "stately appearance" in 1 Sam 25:3. Mar'eh occurs 103 times; this word and to'ar are descriptive of blessing in Gen 39:6: "Now Joseph was handsome in form [to'ar] and appearance [mar'eh]" (NASB). Mar'eh refers more to external "appearance" Gen 2:9, and the word can also connote "sight" as in a range of vision Lev 13:3 and "sight" in the sense of a supernatural "sight" or manifestation Ex 3:3.

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