

Dr. Knut Heim, Proverbs, Session 3, The Fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7; 9:10) Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Heim, Proverbs, Session 1, Introduction, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Dr. Knut Heim's "Proverbs" series focuses on interpreting the meaning of "fear of the Lord" in Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10. Heim argues against a literal interpretation of fear, proposing instead that it represents obedient trust in God, a relationship fostering a godly life. He challenges the common interpretation of "beginning of wisdom," suggesting the text's deliberate ambiguity is a poetic device meant to be interpreted imaginatively, encompassing multiple aspects of wisdom's essence. Heim contrasts this with interpretations that view the wisdom in Proverbs as secular, highlighting the book's underlying theological foundation. Finally, he demonstrates how the concept of "fear of the Lord" is a recurring theme throughout Proverbs, emphasizing its practical and relational aspects.

**2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Heim, Session 1 – Double click icon to play in Windows
media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and
click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Psalms &
Wisdom → Proverbs).**



**Heim_Prov_Session
03.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Heim, Proverbs, Session 1, Introduction

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts on the "Fear of the Lord" in Proverbs:

Briefing Document: The Fear of the Lord in Proverbs

Introduction:

This lecture by Dr. Knut Heim focuses on the central concept of "the fear of the Lord" (found in Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10), exploring its meaning and significance within the book of Proverbs and as a foundational principle for understanding wisdom and faith. The lecture challenges a literal interpretation of "fear" as terror and argues for a deeper, idiomatic understanding.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. The Fear of the Lord is NOT Literal Fear:

- Dr. Heim immediately clarifies that "fear of the Lord" should not be taken literally as being afraid of God in a terror-based sense, like a strict disciplinarian. He states, "Now may I suggest this is completely the wrong approach to this phrase the fear of the Lord..."
- He defines it as an idiom, a phrase where the combined words mean something different than their literal sum, using examples like "catch my drift" to illustrate this concept.
- He argues that "fear of the Lord" is an idiom meaning "**obedient trust in God.**" It is a positive relationship with God leading to inspired obedience motivated by trust, not terror.

1. Exodus 20 as Context:

- He uses the story of God's revelation at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20) to illustrate the difference between fear as terror and the fear of the Lord.
- The Israelites are initially terrified by God's appearance, wanting Moses to be their intermediary.
- Moses tells them, "Do not be afraid for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin." This illustrates that God's intention is not to instill terror but to inspire a reverence that leads to obedience and a life without sin.

- The goal is voluntary obedience out of trust and gratitude, not out of fear.

1. **Reverence and Awe are Part of the Picture:**

- Dr. Heim acknowledges that while the "fear of the Lord" is not simply terror, it does encompass reverence, awe, humility, and a sense of one's own shortcomings. He says, "I think the proper way of interacting with God is one with reverence, with awe, with wonder, with deep humility and sometimes quite appropriately with a sense of our own shortcomings..."
- He stresses the need to be aware of the costly mercy of God and not to take God's forgiveness for granted.

1. **"Fear of the Lord" is a Description of Exemplary Faith:**

- The idiom, "fearing the Lord," is used to describe individuals with exemplary faith and conduct, "and you will think of someone who naturally lives out their faith in an exemplary way, in a natural way and in a way that shows deep devotion to God and an obedient lifestyle..."
- Such people are characterized by generosity, love, and care for the vulnerable – qualities stemming from their trust and obedience to God.

1. **Practical Obedience and Relationship with God:**

- The book of Proverbs fosters faith that leads to practical, obedient lifestyles that honor God and contribute to the welfare of others.
- "Fear of the Lord then has to do both with the relationship with God and also with practical, obedient and life-giving, life-sustaining, life-enhancing action in our own lifestyles..."
- Wisdom cannot be had without a personal relationship with God that produces practical obedience.

1. **"Beginning" is a Metaphorical Term:**

- The Hebrew word for "beginning" (*reshit*) in Proverbs 1:7 is literally translated as "head." This is a metaphor, and the word *reshit* is multivalent.
- Waltke's commentary says that *reshit* can mean: (1) *temporarily first thing*, (2) *qualitatively chief thing*, or (3) *principal thing* or essence.
- Waltke ultimately argues that *reshit* means *first thing* because of a similar phrase in Proverbs 9:10 which uses the word *tehillat* which clearly means *beginning*.

- Dr. Heim argues against this, stating that the author of Proverbs 1:7 deliberately used an ambiguous poetic phrase to mean all three of Waltke's interpretations simultaneously: The fear of the Lord is the beginning, the most important part, and the essence of wisdom.
- He quotes Luis Alonso Schökel, "What has been written with imagination must be read with imagination."

1. **Proverbs is a Book of Poetry:**

- He emphasizes the importance of reading the book of Proverbs, and all poetic books of the Bible, with an awareness of the use of imagination in its writing.
- He says "The Book of Proverbs is a poetic text. It is a creatively artistic text." He asserts that the ambiguity present in the use of the word "head" instead of the simple word "beginning" was a deliberate choice by the inspired author.

1. **Religious Nature of Wisdom:**

- Although the Book of Proverbs does not mention specific religious concepts like the covenant or the temple, it is inherently religious in its foundation.
- Phrases like "fear of the Lord" indicate that faith in God is a fundamental assumption. The frequent references to God (in roughly 10% of its verses) reveal a low-key religious theme.
- The pursuit of wisdom leads to both the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God (Proverbs 2:5).
- "The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom" (Proverbs 15:33), this means that the study of wisdom literature is in fact the practice of fearing the Lord, as the fear of the Lord and the teaching of wisdom are metaphorically equivalent.

1. **Theological and Relational Implications:**

- The theology of Proverbs is fundamentally relational, focused on knowing God.
- Theology in Proverbs is very practical: making a difference in lifestyles, values, decision-making, interactions with others and contributing to the common good.

Key Quotes:

- "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Proverbs 1:7)
- "...this phrase the fear of the Lord is a so-called idiom and an idiom is really a combination of words in such a way that the words as a string of words in that sequence mean something not just something more but something different from the sum of the meaning of the individual words of the idiomatic phrase."
- "What has been written with imagination must be read with imagination."
- "Fear of the Lord does not mean being afraid of God but having a positive, trusting relationship with God that then leads to a positively inspired obedience not because out of fear but motivated by trust."
- "Do not be afraid for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin." (Exodus 20:20)
- "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight." (Proverbs 9:10)
- "The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility goes before honour." (Proverbs 15:33)

Conclusion:

Dr. Heim's lecture provides a nuanced and insightful understanding of the "fear of the Lord," moving beyond a literal interpretation of fear to emphasize a relational, trust-based obedience to God. This concept is not only the beginning of wisdom but also its most important aspect and very essence. This understanding of the "fear of the Lord" is crucial for properly approaching the book of Proverbs and for living a life that is both wise and pleasing to God. This also reveals that the book of Proverbs is a very deeply theological and relational text.

4. Study Guide: Heim, Proverbs, Session 1, Introduction

The Fear of the Lord in Proverbs: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the literal interpretation of the phrase "fear of the Lord," and why does Heim argue against this interpretation?
2. Explain the concept of an idiom, and give one of Heim's examples.
3. According to Heim, what does the idiom "fear of the Lord" actually mean?
4. Describe the events at Sinai that Heim uses to illustrate his point about the fear of the Lord.
5. How does Moses' statement in Exodus 20:20 clarify the meaning of "fear of the Lord?"
6. What is the significance of the word "reshit" in Proverbs 1:7 and what are three possible meanings?
7. According to Bruce Waltke, which meaning of "reshit" is the most accurate and why?
8. Why does Heim disagree with Waltke's interpretation of "reshit" and what does he suggest instead?
9. How does Heim use the phrase, "what has been written with imagination must be read with imagination" to interpret Proverbs 1:7?
10. How does the phrase "fear of the Lord" connect to the idea of wisdom in the book of Proverbs?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The literal interpretation of "fear of the Lord" is being afraid of God, like a strict teacher with a big stick. Heim argues against this, as it presents a negative and fear-based relationship with God, instead of one based on trust and obedience.
2. An idiom is a combination of words where the phrase's meaning is different from the sum of its individual words. For example, "catch my drift" means to understand the deeper significance, not literal catching.

3. Heim argues that the idiom "fear of the Lord" means obedient trust in God, not a sense of terror. It is a positive, trusting relationship that leads to inspired obedience, motivated by trust and not fear.
4. At Sinai, after witnessing God's glory, the people were terrified and asked Moses to be their intermediary. They were afraid to encounter God directly, even though they wanted to obey.
5. Moses' statement clarifies that God intends to instill "fear" in them so that they will not sin. This "fear" is not terror but a reverent awe and a motivator for obedience.
6. "Reshit" is translated as "beginning" but it literally means "head". It can mean "temporarily first," "qualitatively chief," or "philosophically principal."
7. Waltke argues that "temporarily first" is the most accurate meaning, based on a comparison with a similar passage in Proverbs 9:10 where the word "tehillah," means "beginning," is used.
8. Heim disagrees with Waltke and suggests that the multivalent nature of "reshit" is not a problem but a deliberate choice by the author. He sees it as an intentional use of poetic language to convey multiple meanings.
9. Heim uses this phrase to emphasize that poetic and imaginative texts like Proverbs should be approached imaginatively. He argues the word choice was intended to convey multiple meanings, not just "first thing."
10. The "fear of the Lord" is essential to wisdom because it represents a relational and practical connection with God. It is not merely a religious idea but one that inspires a lifestyle of obedience and moral action.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the different interpretations of the phrase "fear of the Lord" presented by Heim. How does he argue for his interpretation, and what are its implications for understanding the Book of Proverbs?
2. Explain the significance of the terms "reshit" and "tehillat" and their relationship to the broader interpretation of Proverbs. How does Heim use these terms to support his reading of the text?
3. Analyze the role of poetic language and imaginative interpretation in Heim's reading of Proverbs. How does this approach differ from more traditional exegetical methods, and why does Heim think it is important?
4. Explore the connection between the "fear of the Lord" and the concept of wisdom, according to Heim. How does this relationship manifest itself in the Book of Proverbs, and what does it suggest about the nature of true wisdom?
5. Assess the importance of "the fear of the Lord" as both a theological concept and a practical framework for daily life, based on Heim's analysis of the text. How does it impact personal relationships, ethical behavior, and engagement with God?

Glossary of Key Terms

Fear of the Lord: An idiom that, according to Heim, expresses obedient trust in God, leading to a life of practical godliness, rather than literal fear of God.

Idiom: A combination of words whose meaning is not predictable from the usual meanings of the individual words. It has a figurative, not literal meaning.

Theophany: A visible manifestation of God, often with sensory elements such as thunder, lightning, and smoke.

Covenant: A formal agreement or relationship between God and his people, based on promises, obligations, and mutual commitment.

Reshit: The Hebrew word for "head," translated in Proverbs 1:7 as "beginning," which carries the meanings of "first," "chief," or "principal," according to Heim.

Tehillat: The Hebrew word for "beginning" used in Proverbs 9:10, which provides a more literal sense of beginning in contrast to "reshit."

Multivalent: Having multiple meanings or interpretations, especially when referring to words or symbols.

Exegesis: The critical interpretation of a text, especially of scripture.

Metaphor: A figure of speech that directly refers to one thing by mentioning another for rhetorical effect.

Secular: Not pertaining to or connected with religion.

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5. FAQs on Heim, Proverbs, Session 1, Introduction, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on "The Fear of the Lord" in Proverbs

- **What does "the fear of the Lord" literally mean and why is that not the correct interpretation?** Literally, "the fear of the Lord" could be interpreted as being afraid of God, as if God were a strict and punitive teacher ready to punish every wrong action. However, this literal understanding is not accurate. Instead, "the fear of the Lord" is an idiom that expresses a trusting, obedient relationship with God, not one based on terror or anxiety. It signifies a positive, reverent relationship that motivates obedience out of trust and gratitude, rather than fear of punishment.
- **What is an idiom, and how does that apply to "the fear of the Lord?"** An idiom is a phrase or expression where the combined meaning of the words is different from the literal sum of their individual meanings. For instance, "catch my drift" means "understand the deeper significance" and not actually catching anything in the literal sense. Similarly, "the fear of the Lord" is an idiom signifying obedient trust in God, not literal fear. This obedience is a natural outflow of a trusting, loving relationship with God, and not out of a sense of dread.
- **How does the story of God's revelation at Sinai relate to understanding "the fear of the Lord?"** At Mount Sinai, after experiencing God's powerful and awe-inspiring presence, the Israelites were terrified and asked Moses to be their intermediary. Moses clarified that God's intention was to instill a "fear" that would deter them from sinning, contrasting the terror they felt with the intended "fear of the Lord" which is connected to obedience and reverence. This illustrates that the correct "fear of the Lord" is not a crippling terror but a healthy respect and reverence that leads to a desire to live according to God's will out of trust and gratitude for God's actions.

- **Why is "the fear of the Lord" considered the "beginning of knowledge" in Proverbs 1:7, and is "beginning" the only way to interpret that word?** While "beginning" is a common translation of the Hebrew word *reshit*, a more literal translation is "head." The author uses this word with a deliberate ambiguity, meaning that it could also be interpreted as the "most important part," or the "essence" of wisdom. "Beginning" indicates that the fear of the Lord is the starting point for true wisdom, but it also embodies that it is the main and most important component to achieving true wisdom. The fear of the Lord, as a starting point, is essential to the pursuit of wisdom.
- **How does the parallel passage in Proverbs 9:10 support the idea that *reshit* (head) means 'beginning'?** Proverbs 9:10 uses the Hebrew word *tehillat* which unambiguously means "beginning," and because this passage uses similar phrasing to 1:7, many scholars use 9:10 to say that *reshit* must mean "beginning." Traditional interpretation argues that the clearer meaning of *tehillat* in 9:10 clarifies the intended meaning of *reshit* in 1:7 as a 'beginning'. However, this interpretation minimizes the deliberate artistic and imaginative nature of biblical text.
- **Why does the lecturer argue against the interpretation of *reshit* (head) as only 'beginning'?** The lecturer argues against the sole meaning of "beginning" because the word *reshit* "head" is a poetic metaphor, and poetic text should be read with imagination, just as it was written with imagination. The author of Proverbs 1:7 intentionally used the word "head" to create ambiguity and richness of meaning, not because it was a literary mistake. The meaning intended is multi-faceted: that the fear of the Lord is the starting point, the most important element, and the very essence of wisdom.
- **How is the concept of the "fear of the Lord" interwoven with the other themes in the book of Proverbs?** The fear of the Lord is not just a singular concept but a recurring theme deeply embedded throughout Proverbs. It highlights that wisdom isn't just about secular knowledge but is fundamentally rooted in a relationship with God. It links intellectual pursuits with a relational, spiritual attitude, and it motivates people to practice that wisdom in their lives, with their actions reflecting this relational knowledge of God.

- **Does the book of Proverbs present a secular or religious view of wisdom, considering its lack of direct references to key religious concepts like the covenant or the exodus?** Despite the absence of direct references to religious concepts like the covenant or the exodus, Proverbs is profoundly theological, even if it's not explicit. The constant emphasis on "the fear of the Lord" shows that wisdom is a religious endeavor and not just a secular pursuit. This recurring theme establishes that true wisdom cannot be obtained without acknowledging God. In this sense, faith is taken for granted, and the Proverbs is a book that encourages the reader to integrate knowledge of God into all facets of life.