

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, The Fear of God: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Hildebrandt, The Fear of God, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This source, a lecture by Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, explores the multifaceted concept of the **fear of God** through a cognitive linguistic lens, primarily focusing on the Old Testament. Employing **metonymy** as a central interpretive tool, Hildebrandt demonstrates how the phrase extends beyond simple terror to encompass a range of meanings. These include **sacred awe, fear of punishment, reverence and worship, obedience to divine directives**, and **wisdom and virtue**. Ultimately, the lecture argues that understanding the **fear of God** requires appreciating its diverse semantic range as revealed through contextual analysis and its significance as a foundational principle in wisdom literature.

**2. 37 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Hildebrandt, The Fear of God – 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 →
Wisdom and Psalms → Proverbs).**



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3. Briefing Document: Hildebrandt, The Fear of God

Briefing Document: Exploring the Fear of God through Cognitive Linguistics

Date: October 26, 2023 **Subject:** Analysis of the Concept of "Fear of God" Based on Hildebrandt Source **Source:** Excerpts from "Hildebrandt_Fear_English.pdf"

Executive Summary:

This briefing document analyzes the multifaceted concept of the "fear of God" as presented in the provided excerpts, utilizing the framework of cognitive linguistics. The author argues that the "fear of God," a foundational concept in wisdom literature, should be understood not as a singular emotion but as a metonymy, a cognitive process where one conceptual entity (the vehicle) provides mental access to another (the target). The document explores the diverse meanings and manifestations of this "fear," ranging from terror and awe in the face of God's holiness to reverence, obedience to divine commands, and even a designation for moral gentiles. The analysis emphasizes that context is crucial for understanding the specific meaning of "fear of God" in different biblical passages.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Cognitive Linguistics as a Tool for Understanding "Fear of God":

- The author introduces cognitive linguistics as a "new tool" to examine the "fear of God," suggesting it can offer "new perspectives" on this foundational concept.
- The paper aims to explore how the "diverse semantic meanings of this phrase are connected" through the lens of cognitive linguistics.

1. "Fear of God" as the Starting Point of Wisdom:

- The "fear of God has been called the motto or the square, square one, or the primary starting place of wisdom literature." This highlights its fundamental importance.

1. The Genitive Case and the Object of Fear:

- Analyzing the grammatical structure "fear of God," the author points out that "God is the object of the fear, not the subject." This contrasts with phrases like "the wrath of God," where God is the subject. The fear is directed *towards* God.

1. The Ambiguous Nature of Fear:

- Using personal anecdotes (fear of a dog, fear of heights, fear of a strict father), the author illustrates that fear can be "good," "bad," or "ambiguous." Good fears protect us, while others might be irrational. Fear is also presented as a "motive then to behavior."

1. **Diversity of Meanings of "Fear of God":**

- The document outlines a range of meanings associated with "fear of God":
- **Fear of Terror (Mysterium Tremendum):** Inspired by Rudolf Otto's "The Idea of the Holy," this refers to the overwhelming awe and terror in the presence of God's greatness and holiness. "God is so great that when one gets a picture of God himself, the person is totally undone." The author cautions against simply equating "fear of God" with "reverence and respect," stating that many biblical passages imply this "mysterium tremendum."
- **Awe, Reverence, and Worship:** This meaning is often found in "cultic context" and dovetails into "virtue, or character" in wisdom literature, as seen in "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom."
- **Fear of Punishment:** Rooted in God as the "distributor of punishment," this fear motivates righteous behavior. The anecdote of the "frog paddle" illustrates how the potential for punishment can instill fear and influence actions.
- **Humility, Creatureliness, and Piety:** Recognizing one's dependence on God leads to humility and piety. "The fear of God actually humbles a person when they realize their own helplessness."
- **Cultic Observance:** "Fear of God" can be used in place of observing "the cult, the statutes and regulations God has given."
- **Designation for God-Fearers:** This refers to foreigners who demonstrate a general moral character and "fear God," even if they are outside the covenant community. "It doesn't mean that they're members of the covenant community... but they fear God means that they're, they're moral people."

1. **Metonymy as the Key to Understanding:**

- The author posits that "metonymy is our key to understanding the fear of God." Metonymy, in cognitive linguistics, is not just a figure of speech but a fundamental way our brains connect concepts. "Metonymy is a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity or vehicle provides mental access to a conceptual entity, the target."

- Examples of metonymy are provided (e.g., "nice wheels" for a car, "the mouth of the wicked" for a wicked person). The author emphasizes that metonymy operates *within* the same conceptual domain (part for whole, category for member, etc.), unlike metaphor, which bridges across different domains.

1. **Metaphor vs. Metonymy:**

- Metaphor involves "paradigmatic substitution and mappings across mental categories" (e.g., "he shall be like a tree").
- Metonymy involves contiguity *within* a conceptual category (e.g., "the hand of the diligent" referring to a diligent person).

1. **Examples of "Fear of God" as Metonymy in Scripture:**

- The "fear of Isaac" in Genesis 31:42 is presented as an example where "fear triggers God in that context in a metonymy, metonomistic sense."
- The teaching of "the fear of the Lord" is linked to the teaching of "the decrees and the commandments," suggesting the "fear of God then is a vehicle for triggering the commandments."
- Reverencing the sanctuary is described using the word "fear," where the target meaning is respect, not terror. "You don't fear the sanctuary... You show respect."
- Ruling "in the fear of God" (2 Samuel 23:3) is presented as a metonymy for ruling according to God's precepts.

1. **The Teachability of the Fear of God:**

- Passages like Psalm 34:11 ("I will teach you the fear of the Lord") and Deuteronomy emphasize that this "fear" can be taught, particularly in the context of learning and obeying God's laws and commandments.

1. **"Fear of God" as Parallel to Divine Directives:**

- Psalm 19 is analyzed to show how "the fear of the Lord" is presented in parallel with "the law of the Lord," "the testimony of the Lord," "the precepts of the Lord," and "the commandment of the Lord," all functioning as divine directives. "The fear of the Lord is the divine directive. Its quality is clean, enduring forever, the result."

1. **"Fear of God" and Moral Behavior:**

- The example of Abimelech and Joseph illustrates "fear of God" as a sign of general morality and trustworthiness, particularly among foreigners.
- Job's character is described as "blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil," linking fear of God to virtuous conduct.

1. **"Fear of God" in Wisdom Literature (Proverbs):**

- Proverbs 1:7 ("The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge") and Proverbs 9:10 ("The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom") highlight its foundational role in acquiring wisdom.
- Proverbs 31:30 connects fearing the Lord with praiseworthiness in a virtuous woman.
- Proverbs 15:33 parallels "the fear of the Lord" with "instruction in wisdom" and "humility."

1. **Character and Consequence in Proverbs:**

- While Proverbs are not guarantees, they illustrate the connection between character rooted in the fear of God and its consequences, ultimately established by God. "God makes the connection between character and consequence. He's the one that does the consequences. And hence, he is the one who is to be feared."

1. **Metaphonymy: Blending Metaphor and Metonymy:**

- The author introduces the concept of "metaphonymy" as a combination of metaphor and metonymy.

1. **Chart of Metaphorical and Metonymical Aspects of "Fear of God":**

- The briefing anticipates a concluding chart that links the "fear of God" to various metaphorical concepts of God (divine king) and metonymical extensions (theophanic acts, distributor of justice, cult leader, lawgiver, wise sage, awesome being, judge, object of reverence/worship, source of decrees leading to obedience).

1. **Experiencing the Fear of God:**

- A personal anecdote about the author's son serving in Afghanistan illustrates the feeling of helplessness and profound dependence on God, which is presented as a profound way of experiencing the "fear of God." "And so I realized at that point

that I was praying for the life of my son and begging God, thank God, to spare him. And I realized my helplessness. And it was very humbling..."

Conclusion:

The excerpts provide a compelling argument for understanding the "fear of God" as a complex and multifaceted concept best approached through the lens of cognitive linguistics, particularly the concept of metonymy. The author demonstrates the diverse range of meanings associated with the phrase, emphasizing the critical role of context in interpreting its specific significance in biblical texts. The analysis moves beyond a simplistic understanding of "fear" as mere terror to encompass awe, reverence, obedience, moral character, and even divine directives. The anticipated concluding chart promises to synthesize these various aspects within a framework of metaphor and metonymy, offering a richer and more nuanced understanding of this foundational concept in biblical wisdom.

4. Study Guide: Hildebrandt, The Fear of God

Fear of God: A Cognitive Linguistic Study Guide

Key Concepts and Themes

- **The Fear of God as Foundational:** Understand the claim that the fear of God is the starting point of wisdom literature.
- **Cognitive Linguistics:** Grasp the basic principles of cognitive linguistics and its application to understanding the fear of God.
- **Genitive Case:** Recognize the grammatical distinction between the subjective genitive (God's wrath) and the objective genitive (fear of God).
- **Diversity of Meanings:** Identify the various ways the "fear of God" is used in the Bible, including terror, awe, reverence, worship, virtue, fear of punishment, humility, piety, cultic observance, and as a designation for moral foreigners.
- **Metonymy:** Define metonymy as a cognitive process where one conceptual entity provides mental access to another related entity. Understand the different types of metonymy (part for whole, category for member, etc.) and how they function.
- **Metaphor:** Define metaphor as a cognitive process involving mappings across different conceptual categories. Distinguish it from metonymy.
- **Metaphtonomy:** Understand the concept of metaphtonomy as the blending of metaphor and metonymy.
- **Mysterium Tremendum:** Define Rudolf Otto's concept of the "tremendous mystery" associated with the holy, involving awe, terror, and the overwhelming nature of God.
- **Fear and Obedience:** Explore the connection between the fear of God and obedience to God's commands and directives.
- **Fear and Wisdom:** Understand the relationship between the fear of the Lord and the acquisition of wisdom, particularly as presented in Proverbs.
- **Fear as a Virtue:** Recognize the portrayal of the fear of God as a positive character trait, leading to moral behavior and turning away from evil.
- **Fear and Forgiveness:** Understand the paradoxical connection between God's forgiveness and the fear of Him.

- **Fear and the Divine King:** Explore the association between the fear of God and the concept of God (and human kings) as rulers and distributors of justice.
- **Contextual Interpretation:** Emphasize the importance of context in determining the specific meaning of "fear of God" in different biblical passages.

Quiz: Short Answer Questions

1. According to the text, why is the "fear of God" considered so important in wisdom literature?
2. Explain the difference between a subjective genitive and an objective genitive using the examples provided in the text ("wrath of God" and "fear of God").
3. Describe "mysterium tremendum" as presented by Rudolf Otto and how it relates to one aspect of the fear of God.
4. Provide one example from the text where the "fear of God" seems to function as a designation for moral behavior in foreigners.
5. Define metonymy and provide one example of a type of metonymy discussed in the text, explaining how it works.
6. In cognitive linguistics, what are the primary functions of metaphor and metonymy in language?
7. Explain the concept of "inclusio" using Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 as examples from the text.
8. According to the text, what is the relationship between the "fear of the Lord" and obedience to God's commandments and statutes?
9. How does the Book of Job illustrate the idea of "fear of God" as a virtue?
10. Explain how the fear of God can be understood as a "divine directive" based on the analysis of Psalm 19.

Quiz: Answer Key

1. The "fear of God" has been called the motto or primary starting place of wisdom literature, suggesting it is the foundational principle upon which wisdom is built. Understanding this concept is crucial for interpreting wisdom texts.

2. In "wrath of God," God is the subject experiencing wrath (subjective genitive). In "fear of God," God is the object of the fear; it is the fear that people have towards God, not God being afraid (objective genitive).
3. "Mysterium tremendum" refers to the tremendous and awesome mystery associated with the holy. In the context of the fear of God, it describes an overwhelming sense of awe, terror, and being undone in the presence of God's greatness and holiness.
4. The text mentions "God-fearers," which often refers to foreigners outside the covenant community who are recognized for their general moral character and reverence for God, even if they are not part of Israel.
5. Metonymy is a cognitive process where one conceptual entity (the vehicle) provides mental access to another related entity (the target). An example is "part for whole" (synecdoche), like saying "nice wheels" to refer to a nice car; the wheels (part) trigger the concept of the entire car (whole).
6. In cognitive linguistics, metaphor and metonymy are seen as fundamental ways our brains structure and extend language, preventing the need for billions of individual words by allowing us to relate and access concepts through existing ones.
7. Inclusio is a literary device where the beginning and end of a section are marked by similar themes or statements, acting like "bookends." Psalm 1 begins with the blessed man, and Psalm 2 ends with those who take refuge in God being blessed, thus forming an inclusio.
8. The text suggests that the "fear of the Lord" can function metonymically, serving as a vehicle to trigger the understanding and keeping of God's statutes, laws, and commandments. In this sense, fearing God involves obeying His directives.
9. The Book of Job presents Job as "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil." This description establishes the fear of God as a key aspect of Job's virtuous character, which is then tested throughout the narrative.
10. Psalm 19, in its parallel structure, presents "the fear of the Lord" alongside other divine directives like the law, testimony, precepts, and commandment of the Lord. This parallelism suggests that the fear of the Lord itself can be understood as a divine directive with the quality of being clean and enduring forever.

Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the various semantic meanings of the "fear of God" as presented in the text. Discuss how cognitive linguistics, particularly the concept of metonymy, helps to understand the connections between these diverse meanings.
2. Compare and contrast the concepts of metaphor and metonymy as explained in the text. Argue for the significance of understanding these cognitive processes for interpreting biblical language, using the "fear of God" as a central example.
3. Discuss Rudolf Otto's concept of "mysterium tremendum" and its relevance to understanding a specific dimension of the "fear of God" in the Old Testament. Provide biblical examples that illustrate this type of fear.
4. Explore the relationship between the "fear of the Lord" and wisdom in the Book of Proverbs. How is the fear of the Lord presented as the beginning, instruction, or essence of wisdom? What are the practical implications of this connection for living a wise life?
5. Examine the different ways in which the "fear of God" is portrayed as motivating human behavior and shaping moral character in the Old Testament narratives and wisdom literature. Consider examples where it leads to obedience, virtue, humility, and avoidance of evil.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Cognitive Linguistics:** An approach to linguistics that emphasizes the role of the mind and conceptual structures in shaping language and understanding meaning.
- **Genitive Case:** A grammatical case that typically indicates possession or relationship. In Greek, it can have various functions, including subjective (the agent of the action) and objective (the recipient of the action).
- **Laconic:** Using very few words; concise.
- **Metonymy:** A figure of speech or cognitive process in which one conceptual entity (the vehicle) is used to refer to another conceptually related entity (the target). The relationship is typically one of contiguity or association within the same domain.

- **Metaphor:** A figure of speech or cognitive process in which a concept or thing is described by using words or phrases that are literally denoting something else, creating a mapping across different conceptual domains based on perceived similarities.
- **Metaphonymy:** A term in cognitive linguistics referring to the interaction or blending of metaphor and metonymy in a linguistic expression or conceptualization.
- **Mysterium Tremendum:** A concept developed by Rudolf Otto to describe the feeling of awe and terror evoked by the presence of the holy or the numinous. It involves a sense of overwhelming power, otherness, and fascination.
- **Polysemantic:** Having multiple meanings. A word or phrase is polysemantic if it can be interpreted in more than one way depending on the context.
- **Subjective Genitive:** A genitive construction where the noun in the genitive case acts as the subject of the action implied by the head noun (e.g., "God's wrath" - God is the one who is wrathful).
- **Objective Genitive:** A genitive construction where the noun in the genitive case acts as the object of the action implied by the head noun (e.g., "fear of God" - God is the one who is feared).
- **Inclusio:** A literary device in which the beginning and end of a literary unit (e.g., a poem, psalm, or section) are marked by similar words, phrases, themes, or structures, creating a sense of completeness or enclosure.
- **Chiasmus:** A rhetorical or literary device in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order (e.g., A B B A).
- **Synecdoche:** A figure of speech in which a part is made to represent the whole or vice versa (a type of metonymy).
- **Paradigmatic Substitution:** In linguistics, the replacement of one linguistic unit with another from the same category (paradigm) in a specific slot in a structure.
- **Theophanic Acts:** Visible manifestations of God to humans.
- **Cultic Context:** Relating to religious worship and ritual practices.
- **Piety:** Religious devotion and reverence to God.
- **Virtue:** Behavior showing high moral standards.

5. FAQs on Hildebrandt, The Fear of God, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: Understanding the Fear of God

1. What is the foundational importance of the "fear of God" in wisdom literature, and how will cognitive linguistics help in understanding this concept?

The fear of God is considered the primary starting point or motto of wisdom literature. It's a foundational concept upon which wisdom is built. Cognitive linguistics, a new tool in linguistics, offers a fresh perspective by examining how the diverse semantic meanings of the phrase "fear of God" are connected. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the underlying cognitive processes involved in interpreting this multifaceted concept across different biblical contexts.

2. The phrase "fear of God" uses a genitive construction. How does this grammatical structure influence its meaning compared to a phrase like "wrath of God"?

The "wrath of God" employs a subjective genitive, where God is the subject experiencing wrath. Conversely, "fear of God" uses an objective genitive, indicating that God is the *object* of the fear, not the one experiencing it. This means the fear of God is the fear that has God as its focus, prompting questions about the nature and reasons for this fear directed towards the divine.

3. Is fear inherently good or bad? How does this understanding of general fear relate to the concept of the fear of God?

Fear itself is ambiguous; it can be good, bad, or even ugly. Good fears protect us from genuine danger, like the fear of heights when working on a roof or the fear of a dangerous animal. Bad fears can be irrational, like a fear of spiders. Fear also serves as a motivator for behavior. Similarly, the fear of God encompasses a range of responses, from terror in the face of divine power to reverence and respect, and even to the fear of punishment. Understanding the nuances of general fear helps us appreciate the diverse ways the fear of God is presented in scripture.

4. The text outlines several diverse meanings of the "fear of God." What are some of these key interpretations, and can you provide examples from the text for each?

The "fear of God" is not monolithic and carries various meanings:

- **Mysterium Tremendum (Terror/Awe):** An overwhelming sense of awe and fear in the presence of God's tremendous holiness and power. Example: Moses hid his face, afraid to look at God in the burning bush (Exodus 3:6).
- **Reverence and Worship:** Approaching God with deep respect, veneration, and adoration, often seen in cultic contexts. Example: Keeping the Sabbath and reverencing God's sanctuary (Leviticus 19:30).
- **Fear of Punishment:** Fearing God as the one who distributes judgment and consequences for disobedience. Example: The frog paddle serving as a reminder of potential discipline.
- **Humility, Creatureliness, and Piety:** Recognizing one's dependence and insignificance in relation to God's greatness, leading to a humble and devout attitude. Example: Realizing helplessness in the face of God's power.
- **Cultic Observance:** The fear of God used as a metonymy for observing God's statutes, rules, and commandments. Example: The fear of God being linked to keeping the law in Deuteronomy.
- **Designation for Moral People (God-fearers):** Referring to foreigners or those outside the covenant community who demonstrate a general moral character by fearing God. Example: Joseph saying, "I fear God," implying his moral integrity (Genesis 42:18).
- **Obedience:** The fear of God prompting compliance with God's commands and directives. Example: Abraham's obedience in not withholding his son, which God recognized as fearing Him (Genesis 22).
- **Virtue/Character:** The fear of God as a quality associated with righteousness, uprightness, and turning away from evil. Example: Job being described as one who feared God and turned away from evil (Job 1:1).

5. What is metonymy, and why does the author suggest it is a key to understanding the fear of God? Can you provide examples of metonymy from the text?

Metonymy is a cognitive process where one conceptual entity (the vehicle) provides mental access to another related entity (the target). Unlike metaphor, which involves mappings across different conceptual categories, metonymy operates within the same category or domain through contiguity. The author argues that "fear of God" functions as a metonymy, where the phrase itself can trigger various related concepts, preventing us from needing separate words for each. Examples include: "the hand of the diligent"

(hand for diligent person), "nice wheels" (wheels for car), "the pill" (pill for birth control pill), "Washington decided" (Washington for the US government), and "the fear of Isaac" (fear referencing God). The author also suggests "fear of God" can be a metonymy for obedience or God's laws.

6. How does the concept of "sacred fear" (mysterium tremendum) contribute to our understanding of the fear of God, and what are some biblical examples of this type of fear?

Sacred fear, or *mysterium tremendum*, as described by Rudolf Otto, refers to a profound and overwhelming sense of awe, terror, and fascination in the presence of the Holy. It's the "wholly otherness" of God that evokes this unique response. Biblical examples include Moses hiding his face at the burning bush (Exodus 3:6), Isaiah's sense of being undone in God's holy presence (Isaiah 6), and the Israelites trembling and wanting distance when God spoke at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20). This type of fear acknowledges God's majestic power and incomprehensible greatness.

7. How is the "fear of God" connected to concepts like wisdom, obedience, and love in the scriptures?

The fear of God is presented as the "beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 1:7). It's not merely intellectual knowledge but a foundational reverence that guides one towards wise living. The fear of God is also a strong motivator for obedience to God's commands, as seen in Deuteronomy 5:29, where the desire to fear God is linked to keeping his commandments. Interestingly, the fear of God is also connected to forgiveness (Psalm 130:4), suggesting that God's capacity to forgive inspires a deeper reverence. While seemingly paradoxical, this fear isn't necessarily opposed to love for God; rather, it can be a component of a holistic relationship that includes awe, respect, and a desire to please Him.

8. How does personal experience, such as the author's experience with his son in Afghanistan, illuminate the concept of the fear of God?

The author's experience of his son being in a dangerous situation in Afghanistan highlights the element of recognizing one's own helplessness and dependence on God. The intense concern and prayers for his son's safety underscore a profound reverence and reliance on God's power to protect. This personal anecdote illustrates how facing situations beyond our control can lead to a deeper understanding of the fear of God as a humbling acknowledgment of His sovereignty and our need for His grace and intervention.