

Proverbs 1:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Analysis

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. This foundational verse establishes the epistemological principle undergirding all biblical wisdom. The Hebrew 'yir'ah' (יראה) denotes not terror but reverential awe, worship, and submission to God's authority. 'Beginning' (ראשון/re'shit) means not merely the starting point chronologically but the chief principle, the foundation upon which all else rests. True knowledge begins with recognizing God's sovereignty and submitting to His revealed truth. The verse contrasts the wise who fear God with 'fools' (בָּלִים/balim) who 'despise' (בָּזָע/bazu) wisdom—actively rejecting it with contempt. This is not intellectual inability but moral rebellion. The fool's problem is volitional, not cognitive—they reject wisdom because they reject God's authority. This principle recurs throughout Proverbs (9:10) and Scripture, establishing that genuine knowledge requires proper relationship with God. Apart from submission to the Creator, human wisdom becomes futile and darkened (Romans 1:21-22).

Historical Context

This verse opens the body of Proverbs after the prologue (1:1-6), functioning as the book's thesis statement. Written during Solomon's reign (970-930 BC), it contrasts sharply with surrounding Ancient Near Eastern wisdom traditions. While Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom literature valued knowledge for pragmatic success, only Israel's wisdom rooted epistemology in covenant relationship with Yahweh. The fear of the LORD distinguished Hebrew wisdom from philosophical speculation or mere prudential ethics. Post-exilic Judaism (after 538 BC) developed

this into a comprehensive theology of Torah-centered wisdom, recognizing that true knowledge comes through God's self-revelation in Scripture rather than autonomous human reason.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does the fear of the LORD as 'the beginning of knowledge' challenge modern assumptions about neutral, secular education?
2. In what specific areas of your life do you need to cultivate reverential awe of God rather than relying on your own understanding?

Interlinear Text

יְמִינָה	רָאשָׁה	עַתָּה	חָכְמָה	רָאשָׁה	יְמִינָה
The fear	of the LORD	is the beginning	of knowledge	wisdom	and instruction
H3374	H3068	H7225	H1847	H2451	H4148
אַיִלִים	בָּזָבָז				
but fools	despise				
H191	H936				

Additional Cross-References

Job 28:28 (References Lord): And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (Parallel theme): Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

Proverbs 9:10 (References Lord): The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

Proverbs 15:33 (References Lord): The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility.

Proverbs 18:2 (Parallel theme): A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself.

Proverbs 1:22 (Parallel theme): How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?

Romans 1:28 (Parallel theme): And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

Proverbs 15:5 (Parallel theme): A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.

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