Bite Size Bible Study

The fear of the Lord #115   By Pastor Lee

The fear of the LORD is one of the phrases in Proverbs that causes so much misunderstanding. The best I had heard up to this point was that fear meant reverence.

Jeff Benner, who studies Hebrew language and culture has come up with what I feel is a much better translation. The following quote is from his book "Benner's Commentary on the Torah"

The Hebrew word ירא†(yara) is used in the two passages below:

And he said, I heard your voice in the garden and I <u>feared</u> because I was naked and I hid myself. Genesis 3:10

You will <u>revere</u> YHWH your Elohiym and you will serve him and in his name you will swear. Deuteronomy 6:13

Many would conclude from these two passages that this Hebrew word has two different meanings, "fear" and "reverence." This assumption is made with many Hebrew words, but this is caused by having an understanding of the Hebrew vocabulary from a non-Hebraic perspective.

Each Hebrew word has only one meaning but can have different applications. The literal concrete meaning of *yara* is a "flowing of the gut," which can be applied to "fear" or "reverence." Have you ever been so scared or been in the presence of something so amazing that you could feel it in your gut? This "feeling" is the meaning of this word. The Hebrews were a very emotional people, and in many cases their words are describing a "feeling," rather than an "action."

In the following verse the word "fear" is the noun יראה (*yirah*), which is derived from the verb *yara*:

The <u>fear</u> of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. (Proverbs 9:10, KJV)

The common understanding of this verse is if one is afraid of, or in great awe of, YHWH, he will have wisdom, but as we shall see, this is not consistent with its use in the Hebrew language. The Hebrew for "fear of the LORD" (as found in the verse above) is written with two nouns, ייהוה†יראת (*yirat YHWH*). When a noun precedes another noun, the first noun is in the construct state, meaning it is connected to the second noun—two words together forming one concept. An example of a construct noun can be found in the phrase אלהים†מלכות (*malkut elohiym*),

which means "kingdom of God." Notice the first noun, "kingdom," belongs to the second noun, "God."

Below is a partial list of construct phrases from the book of Genesis where the second word in the construct is "YHWH."
    The Voice of YHWH (Genesis 3:8)
    The Face of YHWH (Genesis 4:16)
    The Name of YHWH (Genesis 4:26)
    The Word of YHWH (Genesis 15:1)

You will notice in every instance the first word in the construct (voice, face, etc.) belongs to the second word of the construct (YHWH).

So, why do we think the word "fear" in the construct phrase "fear of YHWH" is "our" fear and not YHWH's? We know God cannot "fear," but the Hebrew verb *yara* literally means "to flow out of the gut." Now the question becomes, "What flows out of the gut of YHWH?"

Let's look at two other constructs, which will shed some light on what "the fear of YHWH" might be. *But his delight is in <u>the law of the LORD</u>; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.* Psalm 1:2 (KJV)

The Hebrew for "the law of the LORD" is ייהיה†תורת (*torat YHWH*). The word תורת means "teachings" and is derived from the verb ירה (*yarah*) meaning "to throw" (in the sense of flowing) and is closely related to the verb *yara*. Not only are they related in the sense that both are from the same parent root, יר† (*yar*), but they are also related by definition.

The second construct is *And the <u>Spirit of the LORD</u> came upon him...* Judges 3:10 (RSV)

In the construct ייהוה†רוח (*ru'ahh YHWH*) we find the word ru'ahh, meaning "wind" (another type of "flowing"), which can also mean the character of an individual.

What flows out of the gut of YHWH? His teachings and his character. Now, let's take another look at the beginning of Proverbs 9:10, but this time from a Hebrew perspective.

The flowings (the teachings and the character) of YHWH is the beginning of wisdom.