

## The Hebrew Corner

Understanding and knowledge are concepts discussed frequently in the Tanach. Yet these are apparently not the same, as evidenced by the following passage (Nehemiah 10:28):

“And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding;”

The phrase translated as having knowledge is from the Hebrew verb yadah (יָדַע, yah-DAH), meaning to know. The phrase translated as having understanding is from the Hebrew verb been (בִּין, BEEN), meaning to understand or to discern. Knowledge may be the end result of an ability to understand or discern, but simple possession of knowledge may be a superficial indicator of a person's capacity to understand or discern, as evidenced by the following passage (Numbers 22: 15-33):

“And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable than they. And they came to Balaam, and said to him, Thus saith Balak the son of Zippor, Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me: For I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people. And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less

or more. Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more. And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do. And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. But the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again. And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff. And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee. And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? and he said, Nay. Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face. And the angel of the LORD said unto

him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me: And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive.”

Although Balaam had the knowledge that God was sovereign, and that he could not speak or do anything in opposition to God, because he did not have a close relationship with God he could not discern that God was intervening by placing an angel to block the donkey's path. He demonstrated a very limited understanding of God's ways, although God gave him the gift of prophecy.

From the book of Proverbs, it is clear that the understanding that God provides is vastly superior to our own, and we can only get it by seeking God and the virtues that are pleasing to him (Proverbs 3:3-6):

“Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

Indeed knowledge necessary for survival may be rejected because of a lack of understanding, as the following passage indicates (Hosea 4:6):

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast

rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”

God had sent his prophets Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and Hosea to the northern kingdom of Israel, but due to their lack of understanding, they rejected the counsel of the prophets, and the law of God, as the passage indicates. Law in Hebrew is torah (תורה, toh-RAH), which can also mean direction or instruction. This may indicate that the tribes of the northern kingdom had rejected any instruction from God, therefore he in turn rejected them.

In the next passage, we see that God ultimately provided a better way for people to obtain the understanding and the knowledge they needed for their deliverance (Isaiah 11:1-2):

“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;”

This is, of course, a prophecy concerning Jesus, whose Hebrew name Yeshua means salvation, God's greatest gift to mankind. The spirit of the LORD referred to here is the Holy Spirit, who provides every believer with access to God's wisdom and understanding.

May have a blessed month and new year, living in the understanding that only God can provide.