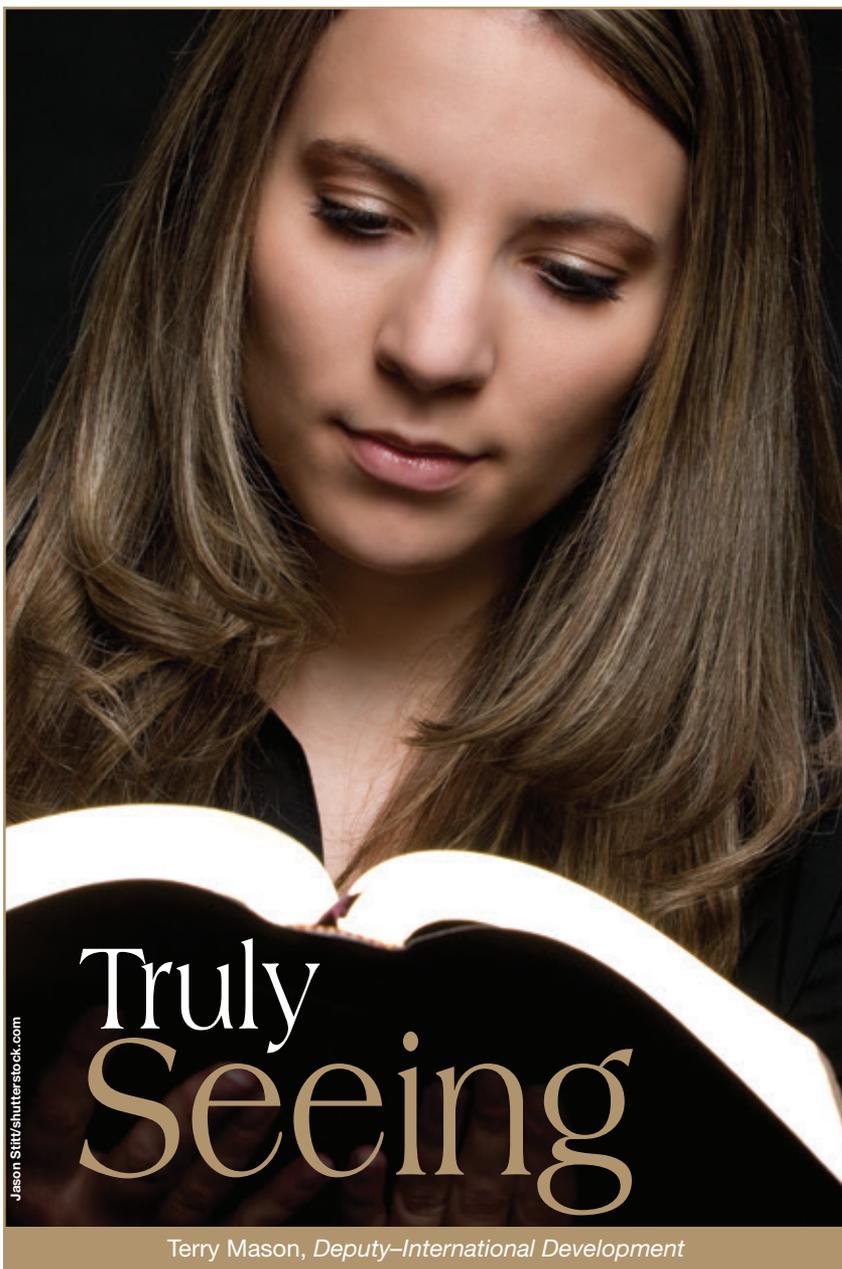


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Truly Seeing

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Bridges for Peace...Your Israel Connection®

Truly Seeing



SOMETIMES AN IDEA or quotation impacts you in a deep way and you end up meditating on it over a period of time. It seems to pull together various other threads that God has been speaking to you about. Recently, I read a quote that really struck me. It referred to the difference between seeing what we “know” vs. truly knowing what we see. As I have pondered it, deeper meanings have come to light causing me to realize how often I make assumptions based on previous, though limited, knowledge or experience.

Abraham Joshua Heschel was one of the leading Jewish theologians and philosophers of the 20th century. In his monumental work *The Prophets* he wrote, “What impairs our sight are habits of seeing as well as the mental concomitants [accompanying thoughts] of seeing. Our sight is suffused with knowing, instead of feeling painfully the lack of knowing what we see. The principle to be kept in mind is to know what we see rather than to see what we know.”

Visual Examples

What we think we know of God often hinders our truly knowing Him more fully. We put our view of Him in a mental box as it were and end up limiting Him. But this concept of seeing what we already “know” impacts us constantly.

Let’s look at a few visual examples of this. What do you see when you first look at Figure 1 to the right? Many people see a woman’s face with two eyes, a nose and her chin. But if you look more closely you may also see a man playing a saxophone in the blackened area to the left side of the picture. Once the second image has been pointed out it becomes almost impossible for most people not to see it when they look back at the drawing.

What about the illustration in Figure 2? Most people see a white vase or candlestick. However, it could also be the profiles of two people facing each other. Do you see them?

Look closely at one final example. How many triangles are present in the diagram shown in Figure 3? Most people say two. But the answer is that there are no triangles. In reality there are only three V-shapes and three circular shapes. Your mind tends to fill in the missing parts and make it look like the familiar shape “triangles.”

Historical Example

In the Writings of the Apostles, in Matthew 16, we see a classic example of a group of people who saw something through the filter of what they already thought they knew. What they expected to happen was based on their preconceived assumptions. After a busy time of ministry among the crowds Jesus took the disciples away to a restful place—Baniyas or Caesarea Philippi. This is a lush area at the southern foot of Mt. Hermon where large springs of cold water gush from the earth. Jesus knew that the disciples needed some time to rest, but He also wanted to teach them without the crowds around to distract them.

He had been with the disciples for some time. He may have sensed confusion and growing



Figure 1

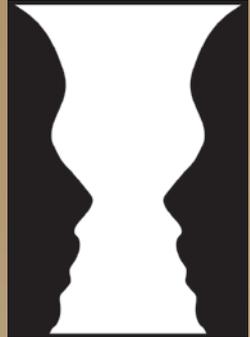


Figure 2

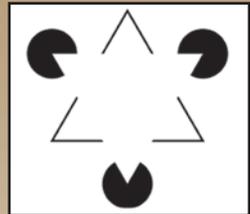


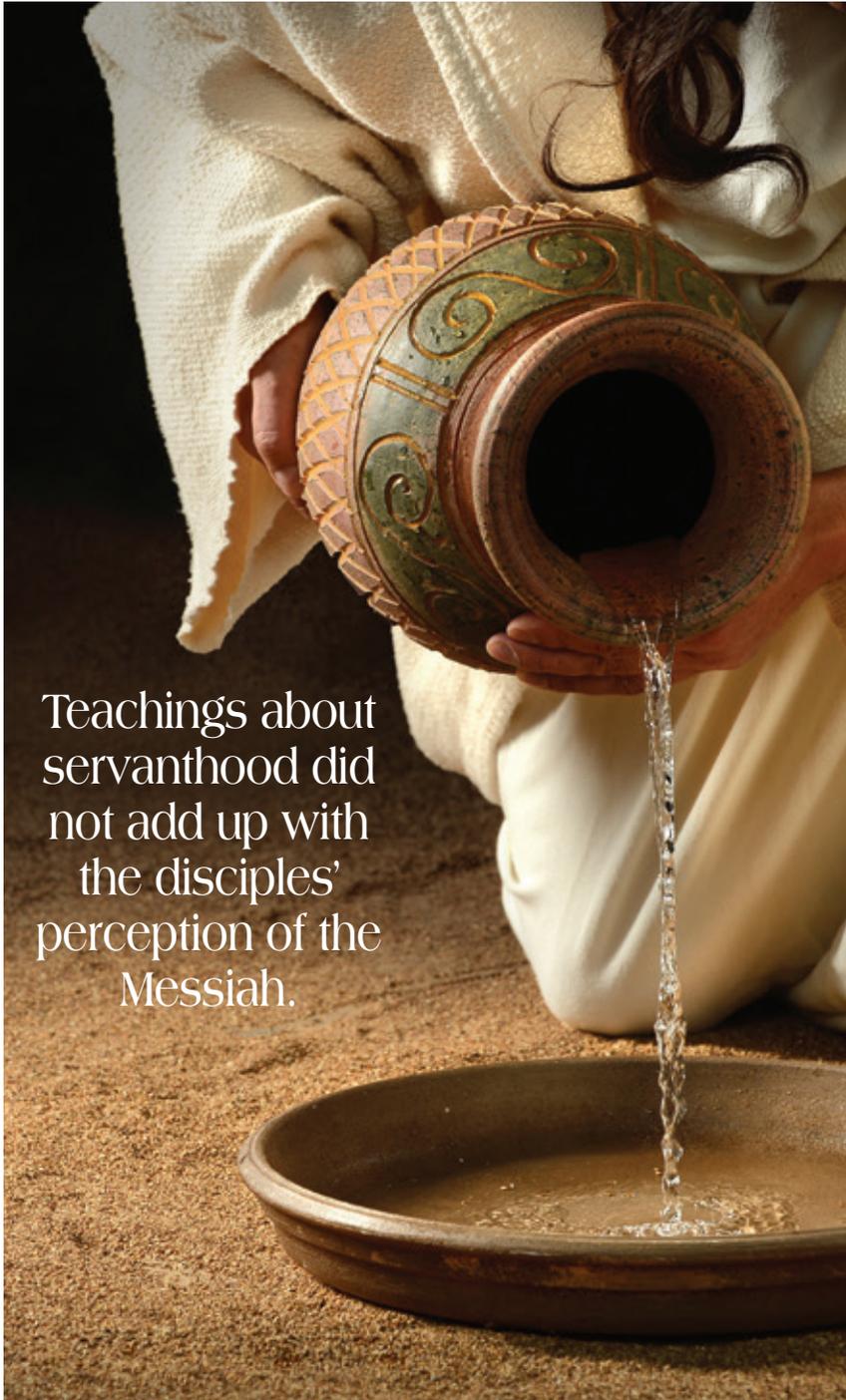
Figure 3

What do
you see?

yourcoolprofile.com/sodathead.com

Bryan Derksen/wikipedia.org

Aaron Lee Geacala/optics4kids.org



Teachings about servanthood did not add up with the disciples' perception of the Messiah.

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frustration among some of them. In this quiet place Jesus asked His disciples two important questions about Himself. *“Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’”* (Matt. 16:13–15). Simon Peter goes on to make his great confession of faith and Jesus responds, *“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven”* (Matt. 16:17).

The disciples were not able to figure this out on their own, even after being with Jesus in ministry for some time. They had seen Him do many miracles. They had heard His authoritative teaching. But they were confused by what they thought they “knew” about the Messiah, what he would be like, and what he would do. Some of the teachings about servanthood and the “first being last” did not add up with their perception of the Messiah.

The Messianic expectation is integral to Jewish thinking and always has been. In Deuteronomy 18:15–18 we read, *“The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’ And the LORD said to me: ‘What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.’”*

From the time they became a nation, the Jewish people were told to expect another great prophet like unto Moses. In times of persecution and oppression the messianic hopes often became heightened and took on a more political focus. Many in Jesus’ day were looking for a Messiah who would overthrow the Romans and reestablish Jewish sovereignty. Many of the disciples were themselves from the Galilee region, known for its nationalistic fervor. The miraculous signs that Jesus performed said one thing, but His own humility and what He taught said another. They thought they knew what Messiah would look like and what He would do, but Jesus did not fit their expectations.

Equally True Today

We can’t blame the disciples really; we all do it. Today there is just too much information to take in. We are constantly bombarded. We rely on worldview and basic assumptions to help organize all of the information that we receive. Heschel is speaking about the mental constructs and overarching assumptions that accompany our seeing when he writes, *“What impairs our sight are habits of seeing as well as the mental concomitants of seeing. Our sight is suffused with knowing.”* But we must realize and acknowledge that these basic assumptions color how we view everything, often without our knowing it.

The Christian apologist G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) said, *“The traveler sees what he sees. The tourist sees what he has come to see.”* Here in Israel we see many thousands of visitors pass through the Land each year. Christian tourism is a great blessing to both the economy and the Israeli public. Many come on packaged tours that take them to all the usual places and the tourists among them accept at



We can make sure that we are “travelers” who truly see, not just “tourists” who are not prepared enough to tell truth from lies.

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face value what their well-educated tour guides tell them.

A carefully chosen tour can be very edifying and informative. In fact Bridges for Peace organizes multiple tours to Israel each year, usually through our network of national offices, introducing Christians to the land of the Bible in all its beauty and complexity. Unfortunately, some tours have a different agenda, determined to spread an anti-Israel message. Through strategically chosen activities and sites, unsuspecting tourists are exposed to a one-sided view filled with half-truths and propaganda. Then there are the travelers with a deep desire to mingle with the people and experience the reality of Israel. They want to learn firsthand what is really happening on the ground.

In our daily journey through life we can learn an important lesson and make sure that we are “travelers” who truly see, not just unsuspecting “tourists” who are not prepared enough to tell truth from lies. Having lived overseas myself for the past 21 years in various countries and cultures I have had to learn to see as a traveler. If you want to truly belong you must observe closely and learn from the local people.

Biblical Literacy

People of faith today need to make a renewed commitment to study all of God’s written word. We need to be sure that we are truly seeing and not accepting what we are taught based on old assumptions. How often do you read the Bible and truly study to understand what it means and how you are to live it out?

In May, 2014 Rebecca Brimmer, the CEO of Bridges for Peace wrote a teaching letter entitled “*People of the Book.*” Based on her research for a teaching session with Rabbi Shlomo Riskin entitled, “Why the Best Selling Book of All Time is Sel-dom Read” she became concerned about the high

degree of biblical illiteracy present in the Church today. You can read Rebecca's teaching letter on our website, www.bridgesforpeace.com.

In 2013 the American Bible Society sponsored a survey by the Barna Group to see what the average American believes about the Bible and how often they interact with it. In a random sample of the American public they found that 13% said they read the Bible daily and another 13% spend time in the Scriptures several times per week. If statistics for the Church globally were available I wonder whether they would be much different.

If people are not regularly and deeply studying the Bible for themselves then they are likely to fall into the trap that former United States President J.F. Kennedy warned about in his commencement address at Yale University in June 1962. He said, "For the great enemy of truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, contrived, and dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive and unrealistic. Too often we hold fast to the clichés of our forebears. We subject all facts to a prefabricated set of interpretations. We enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought." His context then was political and economic discourse in the changing global environment of the 1960s. But I believe that his warning is equally relevant to us today. Do we subject our reading of Scripture to a prefabricated set of interpretations? Do we enjoy the easy comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought and study?

Clearly there are matters of faith and truth that do not change and that must be valued and protected. But it is all too easy to hold opinions and interpretations that we cannot defend; ideas that have been handed down to us that we have blindly accepted without studying and making them our own. For centuries, Christians believed that God had abandoned His covenant with Israel simply because they were taught that such heresy was found in Scripture. Many believed the Jewish people were deserving of persecution because they were told that the accusation of deicide was supported by the Bible. Even today, many Christians question the validity of the "Old Testament," because they have been taught that it has been replaced in authority and relevance by the "New Testament."

Learning from Our Jewish Roots

We can learn a great deal from the example of the Jewish people and the high value that they place on study and education. Indeed, study is often considered the highest form of worship. Again Abraham Heschel shares wise insight, "Genuine reverence for the sanctity of study is bound to invoke in the pupils the awareness that study is not an ordeal but an act of edification; that the school is a sanctuary, not a factory; that study is a form of worship" (Wilson).

In another ancient source of Jewish wisdom, *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers) 1:13 Rabbi Hillel says, "He who does not increase [his *Torah* learning] decreases it." In our faith (fullness) we cannot stay even. We are either going forward or we are slipping backwards. Rabbi Yonah said, "Life is made for growth. One who feels no need to learn more is spiritually dead; the gift of life is wasted on him." Yonah's strong words are a challenge for us to think seriously about how much

The parents, and especially the father, are expected to teach both by lesson and example.



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we value God's Word. Do we feel keenly the need to grow and learn, or are we in danger of becoming spiritually dead?

"Rabbinic literature emphasizes that each member of the community should be diligent to maintain a study schedule. This was a *mitzvah*, a religious duty. Indeed the rabbis taught that in the life to come, when a person is led in to be judged, one of the first questions that the person must answer is, 'Did you fix times for learning?' (*Babylonian Talmud*, Shabbat 31a). In more precise terms this question means: 'Have you set yourself regular periods to study the *Torah*?' (Wilson).

It Begins with the Family

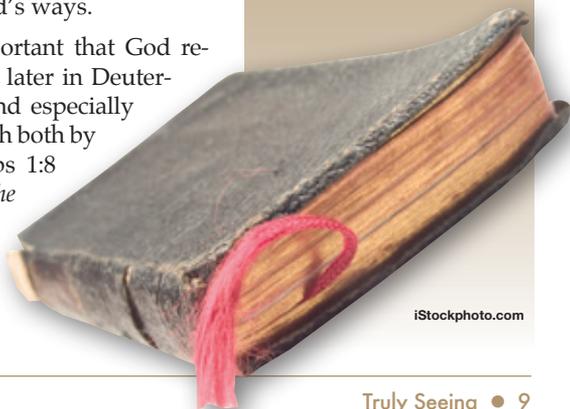
The center of learning in Jewish society has traditionally been the home. Indeed Abraham, the founding patriarch of the Jewish people, was chosen for this purpose. God said, "*For I have known [chosen] him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him*" (Gen. 18:19).

Later in the *Torah* God gave the same command to all of Abraham's descendants and it is taken seriously. "*And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up*" (Deut. 6:6-7). Even today as we walk through the alleyways in our Jerusalem neighborhood it is common to hear parents talking with their children about Scripture and God's ways.

This command is so important that God repeats it again a few chapters later in Deuteronomy 11:19. The parents, and especially the father, are expected to teach both by lesson and example. Proverbs 1:8 admonishes, "*My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother...*" Again it is repeated almost verbatim a few

"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children..."

Deuteronomy 6:6-7a



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chapters later in Proverbs 6:20. Both parents are to take seriously their responsibility to train their children to lead moral and ethical lives based on God's principles.

"According to the sages of the *Talmud* [rabbinic commentary on Jewish tradition and the Hebrew Scriptures], after circumcision and *Pidyon Haben* [redemption of the firstborn son], a father's primary responsibilities are to teach the child *Torah*, to find him/her a spouse, and to teach the child a trade (*Kiddushin* 29a)."

A Community Effort

Making study and learning a high value is not only the responsibility of the family unit. The community is also expected to encourage learning. One way that this can be done is by making places of study available along with the necessary resources. "Let your house be a meeting place for *Torah* scholars; you shall be dusty in the dust of their feet; and you shall drink in their words thirstily" (*Pirkei Avot* 1:4). The community can also give honor to those who teach. As Paul admonished his disciple Timothy, "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5:17).

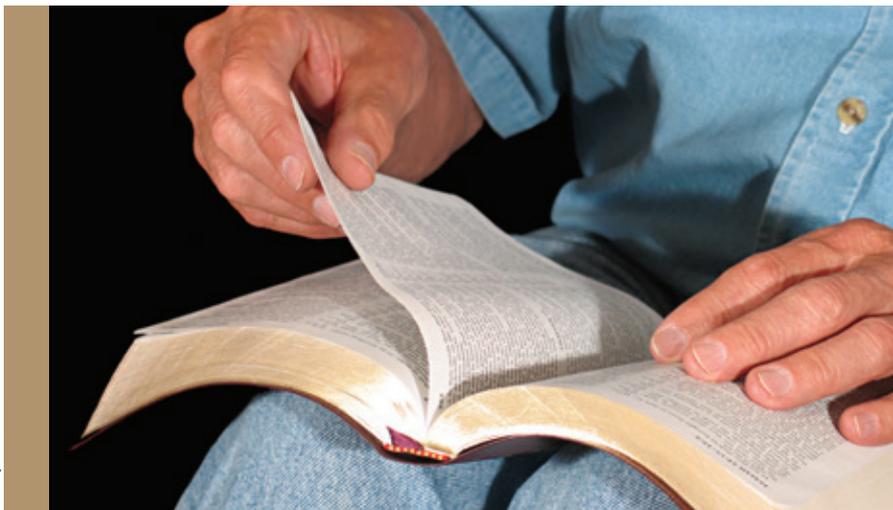
In considering the state of Christian education today and what the Church could learn from its Jewish roots, Marvin Wilson says, "But the Church should be inspired to rethink its commitment to a program of Christian education which is serious in its goals of learning. Too often the Church's attitude toward learning amounts to little more than passive satisfaction with its seemingly superficial Sunday scanning of the Scriptures."

The Apostle Paul, who trained at the feet of one of Israel's leading sages of his day, Gamaliel, encouraged Timothy, "Be diligent [study] to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). In addition we have the example of the Bereans in Acts 17:11, "They received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." They did not just blindly accept what Paul said because he came from Jerusalem and had trained with the leading scholars of his day. They dug in and studied for themselves.

As the late Hebraic roots teacher of blessed memory, Dwight A. Pryor, used to teach, "Learning is for life and life is for learning." It should never stop. Marvin Wilson summarizes for the Church today, "Accordingly, a Christian has only two options. The first is to profess an identity with 'the People of the Book' while remaining largely ignorant about what the identity entails. The other—and only viable—option is to dedicate oneself to learning, a life-sustaining adventure in worship. Then will be realized the inspired wisdom of the ancient Hebrew sage who taught, 'Hold on to instruction, do not let it go, guard it well, for it is your life'" (Prov. 4:13).

Conclusion

After all of this discussion about the high value one should place on study and learning we need to ask the question, "Why? What's the purpose?" The



Jewish Agency summarizes the purpose of education in an article entitled *Parents as Educators*, “The great importance attached to education in Jewish law and literature is unparalleled. The Bible clearly indicates the importance of study and mental growth from the cradle throughout life. The purpose of education in the biblical perspective is to develop individuals who reflect the biblical values defined in the *Torah*.”

Marvin Wilson further expands our understanding when he writes, “The aim of learning was holiness in living—to be set apart unto God in every dimension of life. This holiness required knowledge of God’s acts in history and a commitment to observe his *mitzvot* (commandments), which instructed one how to live.”

From these explanations we see that the purpose of study is both to know and to do, to understand and to execute. We must understand who God is in order to have faith and that faith should produce action. One of the most used Hebrew words for faith is *emunah*, usually translated as faithfulness. It comes from the root *aman* to “believe” or “trust.” “Faith” (*emunah*) usually equals “faithfulness” in Scripture. We can say that there are two aspects of *emunah*: attitude and action. An **attitude** of trust is the belief part, but it is the **action** of obedience that reveals our true faith.

“The Greeks learned in order to comprehend. The Hebrews learned in order to revere” (Heschel, quoted in Wilson). “To the Greek, knowledge was the main way to virtue; the path to the good life was through the intellect. But to the Hebrew, wisdom went beyond intellectual pursuit; it was practical. Wisdom was established upon God-given principles of right and wrong. These principles had to be fleshed out in daily living, in the commonsense dimensions of interpersonal relationships” (Wilson).

This Hebraic understanding for the purpose of study was emphasized in the Christian Scriptures perhaps most notably in the Book of James, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be

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given to him. But let him ask in faith without any doubting...” (James 1: 5–6a).

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:22–25).

The ultimate purpose of our study should be to know God more and reflect His character of compassionate righteousness and moral justice to a hurting world. Continue to trust God and continue to study His word. Once you truly know what you see with God’s help, walk in it. Take Heschel’s excellent advice and learn to know what you see rather than to see what you already think you “know.”

“Be diligent [study] to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

2 Timothy 2:15

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Scripture is taken from the New King James, unless otherwise noted.



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