

# WISDOM IN DANIEL AND THE ORIGIN OF APOCALYPTIC

by

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In this paper, I am concerned with the relationship of the book of Daniel and the biblical wisdom literature. The study draws its impetus from the belief of von Rad that apocalyptic is the "child" of wisdom (1965, II, pp. 304–15). My intent is to test von Rad's claim by a study of wisdom terminology in Daniel in order to determine whether, in fact, that book has its roots in the wisdom tradition. Adequate evidence has been gathered to demonstrate a robust connection between the narratives of Daniel 1–6 and mantic wisdom which employs the interpretation of dreams, signs and visions (Müller, 1972; Collins, 1975). Here I am concerned to dispell the continuing notion that apocalyptic as exhibited in Daniel (especially in chapters 7–12) is the product of the same wisdom circles from which came the proverbial biblical books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job and the later Ben Sirach.<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to the work of Whybray (1974), who has dealt exhaustively with the terminology of biblical wisdom, and to the work of Crenshaw (1969), who, among others, has rightly cautioned that the presence of wisdom vocabulary is insufficient evidence of sapiential influence.<sup>2</sup>

Whybray (1974, pp. 71–154) distinguishes four categories of wisdom terminology: a) words from the root *hkm* itself; b) other characteristic terms occurring only in the wisdom corpus (5 words); c) words characteristic of wisdom, but occurring so frequently in other contexts as to render their usefulness in determining sapiential influence questionable (23 words); and d) words characteristic of wisdom, but occurring only occasionally in other OT traditions (10 words).

From a wisdom vocabulary of approximately 40 words thus isolated by Whybray, we find only six represented in Daniel: *hokmā/hākām*

1. For a critique of von Rad's thesis which does not, unfortunately, consider the importance of mantic wisdom, see Osten-Sacken (1969).

2. For others of like mind, see Schmid (1966) and Murphy (1967).

(group a above); *ašrê*, *bîn/bînā*, *da<sup>c</sup>at*, *rāšôn* (group c); *skl* (group d). Initially, then, on the basis of the ratio of possible to actual vocabulary, the evidence for sapiential influence in Daniel is not at all impressive (40:6). In addition, four of these terms (*ašrê*, *bîn/bînā*, *da<sup>c</sup>at*, *rāšôn*) fall in Whybray's inconclusive category c, which is least helpful in establishing sapiential influence. I turn now to a brief analysis of those wisdom terms which do occur in Daniel.

### WORDS OF THE ROOT *ḤKM*

*Hokmā* is, of course, the most general Hebrew term for 'wisdom'. While all that wisdom is cannot be exhausted by this expression, it remains the predominant word employed and occurs some 85 times in the wisdom corpus of Job-Proverbs-Ecclesiastes.<sup>3</sup> In the text of Daniel, *ḥokmā* occurs nine times and is found in both Hebrew and Aramaic sections. Hebrew occurrences are confined to chapter one, however, and altogether the term does not appear beyond chapter five. From the distribution of the term it becomes clear that *ḥokmā* has nothing at all to do with the formative Hebrew chapters 8–12, which bear the deepest concerns of the book in its present form. The only Hebrew occurrences are found in chapter one (1:4, 17, 20), which is generally agreed to have been composed as an introduction to the Aramaic stories in chapters 2–7 and to provide a link between those stories and the visionary material in the later Hebrew chapters.

In addition, all occurrences of *ḥokmā* are found in narrative contexts which describe the activities of wisemen (2:2; 2:12; 5:7) and the interpretation of dreams. The term *ḥokmā* fits naturally in such a narrative context and cannot be assumed to reflect the philosophical viewpoint of the author. The same is true of the distribution of the related term *ḥākām/ḥākāmīm* and its Aramaic cognate *ḥakkīmīn* "wiseman/men". The Hebrew terms do not appear either in chapter one or in the final chapters 8–12. The Aramaic is employed only in chapters 2, 4 and 5 where the explicit wisdom narrative is most strongly present. This fact (that words of the root *ḥkm* occur only in chapters where wisemen are expressly mentioned and play significant roles in the narrative) suggests that the term is not employed for its own inherent value, but casually as a conventional expression which was expected in the narrative context. Coupled with the complete absence of such terminology in the last chapters (8–12), the distribution of words of the root *ḥkm* in Daniel

3. Word counts and studies are based on personal reference to Mandelkern (1971) and Brown, Driver, and Briggs (1968).

raises the question whether "wisdom" was a vital concern of the editor(s) responsible for the final form of the book.

### OTHER WISDOM TERMINOLOGY IN DANIEL

Of the more specific wisdom terms isolated by Whybray, only a few are employed in the text of Daniel.

1. *ašrê* "blessed, happy" occurs but once in Daniel 12:12 to describe the happy state of the individual who is able to endure to the end of the "one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days" decreed at the end. Such usage is consistent with that of wisdom, but, as Whybray (1974, p. 126) notes, the term is employed broadly in the Old Testament and, in a majority of cases, in non-wisdom contexts. As a result he considers *ašrê* "to be useless as a criterion of [wisdom] influence".

2. *rāšôn* "delight, favor; desire of someone" appears four times in Daniel (8:4; 11:3, 16, 36). All are references to kings or kingdoms and occur in the fixed expression <sup>c</sup>*šh kiršônô*, "He did whatever he wished". These statements emphasize: 1) the power of these kings or kingdoms which could not be checked by their human rivals; and 2) the autocratic will demonstrated by each of these kingly figures which sets up its own desire as the only criterion for action. Such self-determination rejects the will of God and ultimately comes into conflict with that higher rule.

By contrast, *rāšôn* in biblical wisdom is never employed to refer to such autocratic human will in opposition (or indifference) to that of God. Its appearances are limited to fourteen occurrences in Proverbs, where it always refers to: 1) the favor and delight of YHWH (8:35; 10:32; 11:1, 20, 27; 12:2, 22; 14:9; 15:8; 18:22); or 2) the favor and delight of the king (14:35; 16:13, 15; 19:12). In either case, this favor is poured out on the wise servant. The term is never employed in Proverbs to indicate the autocratic will of man in opposition to that of God.

3. *da<sup>c</sup>at* "knowledge". Within the biblical wisdom corpus of Job-Proverbs-Ecclesiastes, *da<sup>c</sup>at* is employed in a variety of uses: 1) as the most general expression of knowledge which is available to the human intellectual endeavor (43 times); 2) as a more specific reference to that knowledge which men have of God (6 times); 3) as that knowledge which God possesses but which is unavailable to human intellectual pursuit (only 4 times); 4) as knowledge which is stressed as a valuable commodity that prospers the possessor (5 times); and 5) as knowledge which is the source of moral evaluation (2 times).

In Daniel, *da<sup>c</sup>at* appears but twice (1:4 and 12:4). The first occurrence does not exceed the most general meaning of the term as that knowledge which is available to the intellectual pursuit of the wiseman. The second

occurrence in 12:4, however, is made definite with the article and is associated with the exaltation of *hammaskîlîm* and the sealing of Daniel's book for the end of time, when "knowledge will increase". This may well refer to that proper esoteric knowledge of events which is imparted only to those initiated by *hammaskîlîm* ("instructors"?) and whose increase is expectantly awaited at the end of time. The understanding of *da'at* as esoteric knowledge is clearly distant from the common wisdom conception of knowledge as the result of experience, observation and the exercise of one's divinely given intellect. On the other hand, it is possible that there is some connection between Daniel's use of the term and the relatively rare sapiential reference to divine knowledge which is unavailable to man's intellect.

4. *bîn/bînā* "perceive/perception", a relatively important concept in biblical wisdom (53 verbal occurrences and 23 nominal occurrences), occurs 21 times as a verb in Daniel and only 4 times as a noun. The verbal form *bîn* has the basic meaning of "consider" or "attend to" and is frequently connected with the senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste) in this capacity. Thus *bîn* can mean "look carefully at" (Prov 23:1); "listen to" (Prov 29:19); "feel [something]" (Ps 58:10); "taste [something]" (Job 6:30); or "think carefully about [something]" (Job 18:2). *Bîn* can also signify the successful completion of these activities: "to see clearly"; "to understand what one hears"; "to understand what one considers mentally". By far the most common usage in the wisdom corpus (38 of 53 occurrences) is this second: "to understand, perceive".

There is a further use of the verb *bîn* reflected in an isolated example in Job 6:24, where the *Hip'îl* imperative is employed to mean "cause to understand/instruct": "Teach me, and I will be silent/ Instruct me (*hābînû*) how I have erred".

In Daniel, *bîn* occurs as a verb some 21 times, all in the Hebrew sections (chapters 1, 8–12). The first two meanings mentioned above appear in Daniel as well. 1) Pay close attention to/consider carefully (eight times: 8:5; 9:2, 23; 10:1, 11, 12; 11:30, 37). 2) Understand/perceive (9 times: 1:4, 17; 8:17, 23, 27; 9:23; 10:1; 12:8, 10). In addition, the third category ("to instruct") is considerably expanded in Daniel, where it occurs four times (8:16; 9:22; 10:14; 11:33). Here the emphasis appears to be upon the transmission of special knowledge which is beyond the capacity of human intellect and must be imparted by divine revelation and esoteric instruction.

The nominal form *bînā* denotes the end product of the verbal activities described previously: "discernment, perception, understanding, insight". Two of the four occurrences of *bînā* in Daniel are closely connected with

*ḥokmā* (1:20; 2:21) and refer only to the most general sense as a capacity for discernment. This use of the term is paralleled in wisdom: “Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight [*bīnā*] . . .” (Prov 4:7); “If you cry out for insight [*bīnā*] . . .” (Prov 2:3).

The remaining two occurrences in Daniel (8:15; 9:22) concern insight into specific phenomena which confront Daniel and were beyond his ability to decipher (i.e., a vision in 8:15 and the 70 years of Jeremiah in 9:22). In both cases, insight requires divine revelation and arrives by divine messenger, signifying its divine origin. *Bīnā* in Daniel, therefore, unlike the wisdom literature, is not the end product of careful observation of experience through the analytic processes of the human mind. It is instead that knowledge which is beyond the ability of even the great *ḥāqām* Daniel to understand and which must be interpreted by divine revelation. It is no longer a matter of discipline (*mūsār*) but of instruction (*ḥāskīl*). It seems clear from the distribution and definition of the terms that *bīn/bīnā* reflect the terminology of the final editor(s) of Daniel. This increased emphasis in chapters 8–12 on instruction in esoteric knowledge sets Daniel’s usage of these terms apart from that of biblical wisdom.

5. *skl* occurs in Daniel, in Hebrew and Aramaic sections, in verbal forms and nominal derivatives, a total of 19 times. The basic meaning of the word is “to have insight”, from which derive additional meanings, including: “to instruct” (i.e., *Hip<sup>c</sup>il* “to cause to have insight”); and “to be prudent” (i.e., “to act with insight”).<sup>4</sup>

Aramaic occurrences are all found in chapter 5, with the exception of one in Dan 7:8 which expresses the basic meaning of the root, “to pay attention” or “to consider carefully”. The three occurrences in chapter 5 (5:11, 12, 14) all lie within the description of Daniel as a peerless interpreter of dreams and are joined with other terms describing his wisdom and prowess (*nahîrû*—light, *ḥokmā*—wisdom, *rûaḥ*—spirit, *mandā<sup>c</sup>*—knowledge). The effect of these terms is to enhance Daniel’s image as wiseman and to establish his authority as interpreter of dreams. They are stylistic devices to support the literary description of a wiseman within the narrative context.

The same is true for some of the Hebrew occurrences, especially those in chapter one (1:4, 17). The term *ḥāskēl* “skilled, trained” there describes Daniel and his three friends and serves to enhance the wisdom narrative

4. Examination of the twelve passages listed in Lisowsky (1981) under the meaning “to have success” leads me to conclude that most, if not all, could be rendered “act with insight” or “cause to have insight” with equally good sense.

which provides the setting of the book, but it has little to say regarding the essential purpose of the book or its origin.

By far the most informative occurrences of *škl* are those in the concluding Hebrew portion (chapters 9–12). Dan 9:4–19 contains Daniel’s prayer of confession for Israel’s failure to seek YHWH and keep his commandments. In 9:13 we read, “as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this evil has come upon us, yet we have not entreated the face of YHWH our God, in order to turn from our sin and to give heed [*ulehaškîl*] to your truth”. Here the failure of unrepentant Israel is its failure to give heed to YHWH’s *truth*.<sup>5</sup> In 9:2, Gabriel, who arrives in the midst of Daniel’s prayer, explains the purpose of his coming as “to instruct you [*lehaskîlkā*] in understanding [*bînā*]”. Again, in 9:25, Gabriel commands Daniel to “know and give heed [*wetaškēl*] to” the interpretation of Jeremiah’s seventy years.

That something more is intended by these terms than simple “attention” is suggested by the last four occurrences in chapters 11 and 12 (11:33, 35; 12:3, 10). All occurrences are *Hip<sup>c</sup>il* participles and, taken together, seem to reflect the designation of an apocalyptic group or at least one segment of it. This group is called *hammaškîlîm* or, in 11:33, *maškîlê<sup>c</sup>am*. The participle may be variously translated as “those who have gained insight” or “those who instruct” (i.e., “those who cause [others] to gain insight”). Either way, the group obviously consists of those who share a common understanding of a common body of knowledge (presumably the proper interpretation of events reflected in the final chapters of Daniel).

From reviewing these later occurrences we find that *hammaškîlîm* believed themselves to have received divine revelation concerning the “truth” of YHWH (9:13); they claim to possess supernatural knowledge reinterpreting the seventy years of Jeremiah (9:22, 25); though they expected persecution, they still felt compelled to propagate their “understanding” (11:33); they expected an eschatological consummation (11:35) in which *hammaškîlîm* would occupy an important place (12:3, 10).

In contrast, of the 16 occurrences of *škl* in the biblical wisdom corpus of Job-Proverbs-Ecclesiastes, 11 are interpreted “be prudent, act prudently, deal wisely”; three are rendered “pay attention, give heed”; one is understood as “prosper”; and only a single occurrence is taken to mean “instruct”.<sup>6</sup>

5. It is probable that “YHWH’s truth” in Daniel 9–12 refers to the esoteric truth concerning historical events revealed to Daniel and entrusted to *hammaškîlîm*.

6. The distribution of other significant terms sometimes associated with the wisdom motif in Daniel (e.g., *mô<sup>c</sup>ēd* “appointed time,” *hēlem* “dream,” and *mar<sup>c</sup>eh* “apparition”)

Once again we find that within the Aramaic section of Daniel *škl* is employed only in connection with the explicit wisdom motif in chapters 5 and 7. In the Hebrew chapters 8–12, there is a clear distinction between the meaning associated with the term in Daniel and that regularly understood in wisdom. There is a shifting of emphasis to “instruction” rather than “prudence/insight”, and this “instruction” is associated with special, divine revelation beyond the reach of normal human intellect.

### CONCLUSION

This study of wisdom terminology in the book of Daniel affirms the caution with which it began, namely that the presence of wisdom language is insufficient evidence of sapiential influence. As a result, von Rad’s connection of wisdom and apocalyptic is not supported by this study. In addition, the distribution of terms investigated within the book of Daniel has important implications for the editorial history of the book. The following conclusions are in order:

1. The small number of wisdom terms employed in Daniel out of a considerably larger available vocabulary leaves its sapiential character open to question.
2. The limitation of the important wisdom terms *ḥokmā/ḥākām*, *bîn/bînā*, and *škl* in the Aramaic section to those narratives in which wise-men are explicitly mentioned (i.e., chapters 2, 5, 7) raises the question whether “wisdom” characterizes the viewpoint of the author of these narratives, or is merely necessary literary “window dressing” in support of the narrative.
3. The fact that the literary wisdom motif is absent from the formative Hebrew chapters (8–12) suggests that an alternative explanation may be necessary for the wisdom terms which appear there.
4. The apparent redefinition of wisdom terminology in Daniel 8–12 in relation to its classical use in biblical wisdom casts further doubt on Daniel’s connection with the wisdom tradition.
5. The increasing emphasis observed in chapters 8–12 on the necessity of instruction in esoteric “truth” beyond the grasp of the unaided human intellect suggests an underlying world view which is at variance with that of biblical wisdom.
6. The distribution of terms supports the independent character and origin of the Hebrew and Aramaic sections. The restriction of words of

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also affirms the independence of the two sections. “Dreams” (*ḥēlem*) occur only in the Aramaic stories, while “apparitions” (*mar<sup>eh</sup>*) are found only in the later Hebrew chapters (8–10).

the root *hkm* to the Aramaic stories and the introductory chapter Daniel I is a particularly clear example in this regard.

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