FEAR, ANXIETY AND REVERENCE IN AKKADIAN,
BIBLICAL HEBREW AND OTHER
NORTH-WEST SEMITIC LANGUAGES

by

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By bringing to bear upon the discussion of two ancient Semitic verbs meaning "to fear"—Hebrew yr) and Akkadian palāḫu—the findings of the modern study of the emotions, it is possible to propose a plausible answer to the theological dilemma as to why the Hebrew Bible should employ as a term for religiosity a term which "regularly describes emotions of dread and fright". Moreover, the light shed on Hebrew yr) and Akkadian palāḫu will, in turn, elucidate the nuances of the verb štC (.1.tCJ in Ugaritic, Phoenician, Ammonite, and Biblical Hebrew (see below).

The Hebrew verb yr), which is commonly rendered "to fear", may refer either to virtuous feelings and behavior, which are prescribed, or to non-virtuous feelings and behavior, which are prescribed, or to non-virtuous feelings and behavior, which are prescribed, or to non-virtuous feelings and behavior, which are prescribed, or to non-virtuous feelings and behavior, which are prescribed, or to non-virtuous feelings and behavior, which are prescribed, or to non-virtuous feelings and behavior, which are prescribed, or to non-virtuous feelings and behavior, which are prescribed, or to non-virtuous feelings and behavior, which are prescribed, or to non-virtuous feelings and behavior, which are prescribed, or to non-virtuous feelings and behavior, which are prescribed, or to non-virtuous feelings and behavior, which are prescribed, or to non-virtuous feelings and behavior, which are prescribed, or to non-virtuous feelings and behavior, which are prescribed, or to non-virtuous feelings and behavior, which are prescribed, or to non-virtuous feelings and behavior,
scribed. It is widely recognized that Hebrew \( yr \), like Akkadian (AHW, pp. 812-13) \( palâhu \) and Aramaic \( dîl, \) can mean both "revere" and "be frightened".

However, the corresponding Hebrew and Akkadian verbs \( yr \) and \( palâhu \) are to be rendered "revere" in similar contexts (see below). Amman Citadel Inscription, line 6 should likewise be rendered, "You shall revere the gods". Alternatively, H. L. Ginsberg, "Ugarito-Phoenicia", JANES 5 (1973), p. 135, n. 19, interprets if in the text under consideration as a passive, rendering "You (O great god x) are feared (even) among the divine beings." Again, if the corresponding Hebrew and Akkadian verbs are to be rendered "revere" in similar contexts, Ginsberg's translation should be revised as follows: "You are (or shall be) revered (even) among the divine beings."

Of forty-nine attestations of the imperfect singular masculine of the verb \( yr \) in the Hebrew Bible forty-five employ the verb with the prohibitive particle \( ?îl \) suggesting that the verb refers to inappropriate feelings or behavior; see S. Mandelkern, Concordance, p. 504; see below, n. 31.

The New English Bible (Oxford and Cambridge, 1970) renders the verb "revere" in Lev. xiv 3: "You shall revere, every man of you, his mother and his father"; in Lev. xix 14, 32, xxv 17, 36, 44 where the object of the verb is "your God" the verb is rendered "you shall fear". Similarly, the Jerusalem Bible (London, 1966) renders the verb "respect" in Lev. xiv 3: "Each of you must respect his father and his mother"; however, in the other cases mentioned where the object is "your God", the Jerusalem Bible, like the New English Bible, renders \( yr \) "fear". Tanakh (Philadelphia, 1985) also renders "revere" in Lev. xix 3, but "you shall fear" where God is the direct object. Just as the King James Version renders the verb "fear" regardless of the object so the Good News Bible (New York and London, 1976) eliminates the rendering "fear" in all cases. In Lev. xiv 3 it renders, "Each of you must respect his mother and his father", while in the remaining cases it translates, respectively, "have reverence for", "reverently obey", "have obedient reverence", "obey" and "obey". As for the dictionaries, BDB treats "fear" as the primary meaning and "revere" as a secondary meaning. The latter dictionary is followed in this respect by HALAT, which, aside from a \( ?îl \) usage confined to 2 Sam. xiv 15 and Neh. vi 9, recognizes only the meaning "fürchten", i.e., "fear". Both Frants Buhl (ed.), William Gesenius' Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament (17th edn, Leipzig, 1921), and Franciscus Semkowski Zorell, Lexicon Hebraicum et Aramaicum Veteris Testamenti (Rome, 1968), recognize both the meanings "fear" and "reverence". S. Terrien, "Fear", "Fare", IDB 2, p. 257, asserts that the translators of the LXX "usually render the common Hebrew word \( yir'âh \) by the Greek \( eusêbêta \) 'reverence', 'respect', 'piety' (Isa. 11:2), although they sometimes used \( phóbos, \) which is the most common Greek word for 'fear' (Prov. 1:7a)''. In fact, the normal LXX rendering of the Hebrew verb \( yr \) is \( φοβεῖν \) "to fear" while the Hebrew participle \( yârez \) is rendered by Greek \( εἰρακλεῖσθαι \) "to be fearing". See Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, A Concordance to the Septuagint (Oxford, 1897-1906) 1, p. 580, s.v., \( εὐσέβεια , \) \( εὐσέβεσθαι ; \) 2, pp. 1433-5, s.v., \( φοβεῖν \). Contrary to the impression created by Terrien, the LXX employs the noun \( εὐσέβεια \) in translating the Hebrew Bible only in 1 Esd. i 23; Prov. i 7, xvii 11; Isa. xi 2, xxxiii 6. The other instances of Greek \( εὐσέβεια = \) Hebrew \( yîr'âh, \) \( yîr'ât yîhwh \) listed in Hatch and Redpath all belong to the following apocryphal books: 2, 3 and 4 Maccabees; Sirach; Wisdom of Solomon.

See the lexicons; note that Hebrew \( 'rî \) also has the two meanings "fear" and