

"...for the earth will be filled with the **knowledge of the LORD**, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9b NIV).

"For the land shall be filled with **devotion to the LORD**, as water covers the sea" (Isaiah 11:9b, JPS Tanakh)

Are we to have a perfect doctrinal **knowledge of the LORD** or to live a life filled with **devotion to the LORD**?

It may come as a surprise to find that none of the Patriarchs in the Bible were filled with knowledge of God (by our Western way of thinking), but they did have a complete devotion to Him (by a biblical way of thinking).

Christians often focus on knowledge by defining themselves in terms of doctrines. Great emphasis is placed on informational knowledge, yet that is not God's ultimate goal. Paul warns us that "*knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.*" (1 Cor. 8:1) And James points out that even demons know the truth about God, and it makes them shudder (James 2:19).

In our puffed-up state of knowledge we can do so much damage by trying to tell others what we think they should know. I personally know of an individual who was spiritually damaged for a long time because he was told (by the experts) the reasons his prayers were not answered was because of his lack of faith.

These so-called experts discourage and hurt friends and congregants by falsely accusing them of sin or lack of faith or any number of other sins. Their intent may be admirable but their puffed-up knowledge is weak and of little use. Job had friends like this. God doesn't require us to have all the answers about why He acts as He does. He does expect our devotion to Him in whatever He decides to do (or not do), whether or not we have knowledge and/or understand of His actions.

At times our desire to read the mind of God can even undermine what He reveals in his word. We understand that God is in control over the future events. Then we may conclude that if God foresees all and His plan will be accomplished, there is no reason for us to pray. But Jesus clearly taught that we should always pray and never give up (Luke 18:1).

We would be wise to admit our lack of knowledge and rely on our mutual devotion to each other (us & God) and conclude that if Jesus tells us to pray, our prayers are worthwhile and effective.

When English-speaking people use the verb "to know," they think of the mental understanding of facts. In Hebrew, however, the word for "to know," *yadah*, is much broader in scope. Rather than just knowing information, the Hebrew idea of *yadah* stresses knowing from experience and relationship, and acting on that knowledge. When used in terms of knowing people, it can mean caring for someone, and being intimately involved with them.

This idea is especially important when we learn about the biblical concept called the "knowledge of God" (*da'at elohim*). We may believe that this means to prove God's existence and establish a theology to explain God's very nature. But the Hebrew view is that "knowledge of God" is having a life in relationship with him. We can see this way of thinking when we compare Christian translations of the Bible with a Jewish translation.

*The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the **Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.***" (Isaiah 11:2 NIV)

*The spirit of the LORD shall alight upon him: a spirit of wisdom and insight, a spirit of counsel and valor, **a spirit of devotion and reverence for the LORD.***" (Isaiah 11:2, JPS Tanakh)

This kind of knowledge is not just knowing who someone is, it is devotion to them as well. Jews see the knowledge of God as intimacy with God, knowing him as a son does his father, and as a wife her husband.

We should use that concept when we share our faith. Are we trying to fill people's minds with facts, or are we bringing people to know God personally?

Knowing this, we can understand the Jewish idea that "study is the highest form of worship". Studying to comprehend God's principles is one level; but studying to be in awe of Him, is a study at a whole new level.

When we study God's word in order to know him intimately and do his will; we will be truly honoring and worshipping God as our Father and Lord.

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