

“The Chastening of the Lord”

A Study of the Hebrew Word *Musar*

by Kyle Pope

The book of Proverbs begins with the stated objective - **“To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding”** (1:2, NKJV). The word translated “instruction” in this text is the Hebrew word מוסר *musar*. This word holds a special significance which is valuable for us to understand.

Derived from the verb יסר *yasar* meaning to “discipline, chasten, instruct,” which is also represented in Ugaritic by the cognate יסר *ysr* of the same meaning (TWOT, I, 386-387), *musar* can refer to punishment, training or education.

In the Old Testament, *musar* is first used in the second reading of the Law, when the Lord speaks of the Israelites as having seen the **“chastening (*musar*) of the LORD your God, His greatness and His mighty hand and outstretched arm”** (Deuteronomy 11:2, NKJV). Here it is described as something that they could witness. The next verses list three things which were a part of this “chastening” - 1. God’s rescue of the people by the signs in Egypt and the destruction of Pharaoh’s army (11:3,4), 2. God’s treatment of the people in the desert (11:5) and 3. The punishment of the sons of Korah (11:6). From this example we can see that *musar* is both corrective and educational.

Musar is communicated in various ways. When one is punished for wrong doing it is *musar* (Proverbs 7:22). It is something that can be taught in words - **“My son, hear the instruction (*musar*) of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother”** (Proverbs 1:8). *Musar* can be learned by observing circumstances that surround a person. In the book of Proverbs the writer looks at the rundown home of one whom he passes and learns the value of work (Proverbs 24:30-34). This education from his own observation is “receiving *musar* (Proverbs 24:32).

Musar must be “received” and not rejected if it is to be of benefit (Proverbs 1:3; 8:10; 19:20; Jeremiah 5:3; 17:23; 32:33; 35:13; Zephaniah 3:7). We are urged not to despise *musar* (Job 5:17); the wicked hate *musar* and cast the words of the Lord far from them (Psalm 50:16,17). Fools despise *musar* (Proverbs 1:7). The book of Proverbs personifies *musar* charging the reader to - **“take firm hold of instruction, (*musar*) do not let go; keep her, for she is your life.”** (Proverbs 4:13). The “reproofs” of *musar* are **“the way of life”** (Proverbs 6:23).

While human beings can teach *musar* it is primarily something we learn from God. Jeremiah shows us that a benefit of a living God (in contrast to an idol) is the *musar* which He offers. Jeremiah points out that - **“A wooden idol is a worthless doctrine (*musar*).”** (Jeremiah 10:8). The New American Standard calls this **“the discipline (*musar*) of delusion.”**

Jesus is offered as *musar*. In the beautiful and yet heartbreaking prophecy in the book of Isaiah which tells us about the suffering Messiah we see Jesus as *musar*. The text reads - **“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement (*musar*) for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.”** (53:5). This tells us more than simply that Jesus suffered the punishment we deserved. Jesus was the instruction (*musar*) that we must receive. Looking at His suffering should teach us the seriousness or sin and its penalty. This instruction (*musar*) if accepted can bring us peace with God.