

WORD STUDY

סוד *Sôwdh* or *çôwdh*

"Surely the Lord God does nothing,
Unless He reveals His *intimate secret counsels* to His servants the prophets." (Amos 3.7)

Amos 3.7 must be one of the most beautiful pictures of the early relationship between the prophet and God. A proper understanding of the picture language that Hebrew is able to portray enhances the full meaning of this verse. The word סוד *çôwdh* (Strong's No. 5475), usually rendered 'secret' in this passage is not done justice to unless the whole canvas is painted. It is properly a 'cushion, couch or pillow', something on which one 'reclines'. But this seems a world away from most translations.

- Adam, Enoch and Noah walked with God (Genesis 3.8; 5.22,24; 6.9)
- Abraham was a friend of God (Isaiah 41.8; James 2.23)
- Moses knew God face to face (Numbers 12.6-8; Exodus 33.11)

Under the Old Covenant Moses knew God more intimately than those under the New! And his desire was that we might all be prophets (Numbers 11.17,29), how much more should we want to be face to face friends of God. *Çôwdh* describes a face to face encounter between God and the prophet, a sitting down together, if you like, as a circle of friends.

Çôwdh derives from a root verb סד' *yâçadh* (Strong's No. 3245) which means 'a setting down, to found or establish' and 'to support oneself whilst leaning or reclining'. 'Reclining' was the favourite position of John, Jesus' disciple (John 13.23), the one who gave us the prophetic book: Revelation.

Çôwdh is used elsewhere in Scripture to describe friends conversing (Jeremiah 6.11; 15.17), judges, heavenly powers and prophets consulting with God (Jeremiah 23.18,22), counsel and friendly conversation (Psalm 55.14), secret knowledge (Psalm 25.14; Proverbs 25.9).

The idea of secrets is not so much that of heavenly knowledge to which only the elite have access but more with respect to counsel and confidential plans which God opens up to His friend the prophet.

The best way of imagining it is to think of the prophet and God sitting down together on adjacent cushions in a nomad's tent in the desert to discuss matters, in intimacy, not needing to shout.



It is the side-by-side, still, quiet intimate voice of God that is heard here, not the voice of the earthquake, thunder or fire.

Job's usage of the word is especially instructive and illuminating as his is probably the oldest Hebrew book of Scripture, perhaps dating back to 2000 B.C./B.C.E., contemporary with Abraham and the age of nomadic tents and caravans. In Job 15.8 it is paired in Hebrew parallelism with the word for wisdom, חִכְמָה *chokh'mâh* and Eliphaz asks if Job was a party to God's secret plans:

"Have you heard the *secret counsel* of God?
And do you limit wisdom to yourself?"

Job 19.19 is rendered "all of my close friends abhor me" in the New King James Bible and the word translated as 'close friends' is again *çôwdh*.

Job 29.4 is part of a beautiful passage which begins in verse 1 as a מִשְׁלַּל *mâshâl* (the Hebrew for parable, usually translated here as 'discourse') describing Job's longing for his youthful maturity when he had the respect of his elders and sat amongst them as their chief because of his wisdom and counsel (Job 29.7,21-27). His wisdom was derived from God's presence in his tent:

"as I was in the days of my harvest (ripe maturity),
when the friendly counsel of God was on my tent;" (NKJV)

"... when God was secretly in my tabernacle" (Latin Vulgate)

"... When the friendship of God was upon my tent" (ASV)

"... when God was the friend of my tent" (Noyes)

"... when God remained cordially in my tent" (Umbreit)

"... when God took counsel with me in my tent" (Herder)

This is a perfect example of the tent imagery mentioned above. Job describes God's presence with him as a lamp and a light, a place where oil and butter/cream flowed, but most specifically used the word *çôwdh* to describe the intimate friendship of God visiting his tent, just as the imagery of God's visit to Abraham's tent in Genesis 18. If you remember God appeared with two others before Abraham who was sitting in the door or flap of his tent. Although Abraham is described as standing before the Lord (v.22) it was God who had come down (v.21) to visit Abraham, called elsewhere His friend. Furthermore, the significance of the Genesis passage is in its teaching that God does not hide His plans from His friends (v.17; cf. John 15.15), just as in Amos 3.7's use of *çôwdh* above. To have had the animated bartering discussion over the lives of Sodom that Abraham had you would have had to have been God's friend!