

# Maškil

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1. The verb *škl* is used in the Bible exclusively in the *hiphil*, although a single exception does appear in the *qal* (1 Sam. 18:30) which Ehrlich replaced, rightly or wrongly, by the *hiphil* participle. The most common tense in which the verb appears is the participle, which is often used as a noun. The only biblical derivative from the root *škl* is *šēkēl*; all others, such as *šklly*, *škllywt*, and *šklmwt*, are later forms.

The Bible translations often render the verb by “succeed,” “be successful,” or “prosper,” but we should not forget that the fundamental sense of the root embraces the intellectual and spiritual faculties, such as perspicacity, perception, discernment, understanding, insight, and, finally, knowledge and wisdom. If applied to life and action, the outcome will be success and victory, carrying something through, achieving one’s aim, for which the Bible has the more common and perhaps more appropriate verb *šlh* (usually in the *hiphil*, though a few passages in which the verb appears in the *qal* have as the subject the—especially prophetic—spirit of God which overcomes and takes possession of a person).

2. Like the derivatives from the roots *byn*, *hkm*, and *yd’*, the words *maškil* and *šēkēl* can be used in the profane sense of human thought, when thought is a result of learning and experience, of quick intellectual grasp or good education, as the following examples show: 1 Sam. 25:3; 1 Chr. 26:14; Job 22:2; 34:35; Dan. 1:4,17; 8:25; Gen. 3:6 (by eating a forbidden fruit).

The book of Proverbs contains many sayings of worldly wisdom expressed by any of the *hiphil* forms from the root *škl* or by the noun *šēkēl* (synonymous with *bīnāb*, *da’at*, and *hokmāb*), but we must not overlook the fact that the whole collection, taken from various sources of the wisdom literature of the time, is a Jewish book and became canonical inasmuch as all wisdom comes from God and aims again at the right knowledge of God. He who aspires to that right understanding, who thinks and acts in the consciousness of his dependence on God is the only true *maškil*. Whoever put the selection of wise sayings together or edited the book did not conceal the intention and the meaning of this collection from the listener and the reader. The introduction of the book, Prov. 1:1-7, each verse of which is important, makes his intentions abundantly clear right from the beginning. The alignment with God is emphasized throughout the book in various ways (cf., e.g., 3:4-7; 9:10; 13:15; 15:24; 16:20,22; 30: 5-6). A *maškelēt* wife is from God (19:14); she who fears God deserves praise (31:30; cf. 1:7; 3:7; 9:10).

3. If we investigate the passages in which forms of the root *škl* play a prominent part, it strikes us that the overwhelming majority are reflections on the knowledge of God, His miracles and deeds in creation and history, His supreme power over all mankind, His will and His pleasure that man should obey His word and the Torah He had given, and walk accordingly, and that man should continually seek the Lord, should recognize, acknowledge, and pro-

claim His supreme sovereignty, and sing His praise.

God should be the center of the thought of the true *maskîl*. God looks down from heaven on the sons of man to see if there is a *maskîl*, one who seeks God and does good; the answer is negative (Ps. 14:1-3; 53:1-3). Not even the shepherds of the people have sought God (and have consequently acted unwisely) (Jer. 10:21). Man must seek God and must search Him out in order to know Him who delights in kindness, justice, and righteousness (9:23). Israel had no insight (*bîmāb*); had they been wise and understanding (*yaškîlû*) they would have considered (*yābîmû*) the outcome (Deut. 32:28f.; Ps. 106:7) and realized (*l<sup>e</sup>baškîl*) His faithfulness (Dan. 9:13). God will do wonders again that they may see and know, that they may consider and comprehend (*yaškîlû*) the hand (power) of God (Isa. 41:20).

4. Man does not consider the ways of God (*lō' hîškîlû*, Job 34:27), but God will bring them to do that consideration and they will fear Him (Ps. 2:10f.; 64:10). The Psalmist promises to give heed to a blameless way of life (*'aškîlāb b<sup>e</sup>dereḳ tāmîm*) and asks God when He will come to him. In another Psalm, he (or God himself?) will give instruction about the way in which man should walk (*'aškîl<sup>e</sup>kā w<sup>e</sup>'ōr<sup>e</sup>kā b<sup>e</sup>dereḳ zû tēlēk*, 32:8). Again the Psalmist asks the fools among the people when they will be wise (*māṭay taškîlû*); when they shall acknowledge that God teaches man *da'at* by His Torah (94:8-12). God makes man wiser than his adversaries by the commandments of the Torah, more enlightened (*bîskālî*) by pondering over God's testimonies than his other teachers (119:97-99).

Israel was to keep the words of the Covenant, God's testimonies in the Torah of Moses, and follow them that they might act wisely and succeed (*l<sup>e</sup>ma'an taškîlû*) in everything they do (Deut. 29:8), wherever they go (Josh. 1:7; 1 Kgs. 2:3), for God will then be with them (Josh. 1:9). The Torah is their *ḥokmāb* and their *bîmāb* (Deut. 4:6).

The *maskîl* who foresees the coming evil should be silent, since he realizes that God Himself is bringing it about in order to punish the people, who did not seek Him and did not do what was good in His eyes that they might live (Amos 5:13; cf. 5:4,6,14f.; cf. Lev. 18:5).

5. David conceived (*bîškîl*) the plan of the temple building after God's personal direction and design (1 Chr. 28:19). God sends a messenger to enlighten Daniel and explain to him the mysteries which he by himself cannot understand (Dan. 9:22, *yāsā'tî l<sup>e</sup>baškîlkā bîmāb*; 25, *w<sup>e</sup>tēda' w<sup>e</sup>taškēl*). David prays that God may give Solomon *šēqeḷ* and *bîmāb* to keep his Torah for only if Solomon keeps the laws will he succeed (*tašfî<sup>a</sup>ḥ*) (1 Chr. 22:12f.; 2 Chr. 2:11). It is also in God's good hand to send an *îš šēqeḷ* (Ezra 8:18) and shepherds after His heart who will lead the people with knowledge and understanding (*dē'āb w<sup>e</sup>baškēl*, Jer. 3:15); He will raise out of David's line a righteous branch who will rule wisely (*w<sup>e</sup>hîškîl*) and establish right and justice (23:5). The king will be wise and successful (*yaškîl*) as long as he keeps the commandments of Moses and God is with him (2 Kgs. 18:7), whilst the enemies will not prevail in any respect (*lō' hîškîlû*, Jer. 20:11).

6. It is only natural that Deutero-Isaiah firmly believes that the Servant of the Lord *yaškîl* (Isa. 52:13), which the modern RSV, NEB—though not as a hero in the battle against the enemy or as an international politician. The older English version (AV) seems to have come nearer to the original intention of the author by rendering the word "shall deal prudently," which did not, however, satisfy modern scholars. The LXX had simply *sunesei* (Vulgate: *intelliget*). The statements about the Servant are introduced with the words that God has chosen him and supports him, that He has pleasure in him and will give His spirit on him (42:1), for his task is to establish (God's)

justice on earth and be a light to the nations. His success rests on this precondition from which it cannot be divorced.

7. Those who make their own gods do not know nor comprehend (the real God), for their eyes and hearts are prevented from seeing and understanding (*mēr<sup>e</sup>'ôṭ. . . mēḥāškîl*, Isa. 44:18). According to Job, it is God Himself who keeps the heart away from all ability of understanding (*šēkēl*, Job 17:4). In other words: it is in God alone that insight and understanding have their origin.

8. We have now to discuss the word *maškîl* in the headings of the Psalms, where it occurs thirteen times.<sup>1</sup> Many attempts have been made at an explanation of this phenomenon, but none of them seems to come to a satisfactory conclusion. The headings are younger than the Psalms themselves. They probably date from pre-Maccabean times.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, as they are "almost certainly not original," the NEB omitted them throughout. It is evident that the term *maškîl* which designates a person who pleases God, is used here in a different way. It seems to connote a special type of Psalm, and the question now is what type of Psalm was selected to deserve this name, for not even ten percent of the Psalms were given this distinction. We have no doubt about the root meaning: "having or giving insight, showing or giving wisdom." What kind of insight or wisdom?

9. Mowinckel defines *maškîl* as "die religiös-moralische Einsicht," "a supranormal wisdom and insight."<sup>3</sup> As such a song was the cultic vehicle of "a supranormal power," it was particularly "effective" in influencing or mollifying God, and Mowinckel, therefore, sees in a *maškîl*-Psalm an "efficacious song." This explanation, at least in its first part, is quite plausible and may come near the truth, but it still leaves us in uncertainty about the significance or intended meaning of the term in the Psalm titles. We must not wonder, therefore, that the introductions to the Old Testament<sup>4</sup> do not hesitate to declare that the technical sense of the word remains obscure.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Ps. 32; 42; 44f.; 52-55; 74; 78; 88f.; 142. Ps. 45 is an exceptional case, for though it is also called *maškîl*, the word is immediately followed by another description: *šîr y<sup>e</sup> dîdôṭ* 'love-song' or 'wedding-song', as if *maškîl* did not fit the contents and character of the Psalm; but perhaps it does, for it is quite obvious that this song was allegorically interpreted, like the Song of Songs (see the distinct allusions in Midrash *Tebillim*).

2 John F. A. Sawyer, "An Analysis of the Context and Meaning of the Psalm-Headings," *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* 22 (1970), 26.

3 S. Mowinckel, *Die technischen Termini in den Psalmenüberschriften*, *Psalmenstudien* 4 (1923), 5-7; idem, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (1962), 2:94, 209; H. H. Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel* (1967), 210.

4 E.g., R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction*, 2nd ed. (1948), 642; O. Eissfeldt, *Introduction* (1965), 453.

5 Rowley, *Worship*, 211, n. 12, mentions some older efforts to explain the Psalm headings besides C. W. Ahlström's attempt in his *Psalm 89* (1959), 21f. Ahlström thinks that the term denoted a psalm used in the "renewal rites." (See Mowinckel's criticism in *JSS* 5 (1960), 295f.). A more recent view is offered by Sawyer, *Analysis*, 26-38, who suggests that the ancient term may originally have had nothing to do with Old Testament Hebrew *maškîl* 'wise'. However, another root *škl* has so far not been found. He reminds us also that "like *miktām*, *maškîl* was taken as an epithet of David by Aquila and Symmachus" (p. 33). It is doubtful whether the two Greek translators were on the right track, for there are *maškîl*-Psalms which were ascribed to others than David. Very likely they did not know what to do with the word *maškîl* in the headings.

10. We may ask how the ancients understood the term. It is always interesting to see how the people of the immediate postbiblical times, who were so much nearer to the Scriptures, interpreted the texts; their views are often illuminating.

The LXX translates it regularly with *sunesios* or with *eis sunesin* (only Ps. 41, 43, 44), which would mean: "of or for wisdom," "leading to wise thinking and living," "for instruction," but, again, we are left uncertain about the kind or essence of that wisdom or intelligence.<sup>6</sup>

11. We do not hear much from the Rabbis about how they understood the term *maškîl* in the Psalm headings. The question, it seems, is broached only once. From Midrash *Tebillim* on Ps. 32:1 where the term occurs for the first time in a heading, we gather that they took *maškîl* to connote a person such as David and explained this interpretation with Prov. 15:24 (with the help of Ps. 34:6 and Dan. 4:31, as opposed to Num. 16:37 and Ps. 55:24): The path of life is upward for the *maškîl*. They are the sons of man who look upward, *šeništaklû l<sup>e</sup> ma<sup>a</sup>lāb*. A modern scholar would hardly agree with this kind of exegesis; nevertheless, it is the upshot of the Rabbis' train of thought. To them *maškîl* indicates a way of life: looking up to God—and (with respect to Ps. 32:1), God will forgive his transgression.

12. The Targumist, on the other hand, identifies the word with *šēkel*, but he qualifies it throughout as *šiklā' t̄ābā*, which is literally 'good wisdom', 'right understanding', 'commendable intelligence', etc.—except in one place, Ps. 78, where that understanding is called *šiklā' d<sup>e</sup> rū<sup>a</sup>ḥ qudšā'* 'wisdom of (in, from, through) the Holy Spirit'.

We should note that already the Hebrew equivalent of *šiklā' t̄ābā*, *šēkel t̄ōb* (which occurs in Ps. 111:10; Prov. 3:4; 13:15; 2 Chr. 30:22) is always understood as a quality or way of life pleasing God. *Yir'at YHWH* as *rē'šūt ḥokmāb* is *šēkel t̄ōb* to all who act accordingly (Ps. 111:10). It brings favor with God and man (Prov. 3:4) and is the opposite of the way of the faithless (13:15). On the passage in Chronicles, see below. *Ṭōbat šēkel*, said of Abigail, is not necessarily *šēkel t̄ōb*.

The Aramaic heading of Ps. 78 points to the right attitude in man's walk of life and anticipates the teaching of the Qumran sectarians of the Holy Spirit as guiding power.<sup>7</sup>

13. If we ask ourselves, what are the subjects of the *maškîl* -Psalms, we find that they express man's repentance and God's forgiveness, prayers for help and salvation, recognition of God's greatness, thirsting and searching for God, teaching the Way, trusting in God, and especially praises for his wonderful deeds.

There are other Psalms which express similar ideas—for instance, the group of the Hallel-Psalms—but only a few Psalms have received the title *maškîl*. These are Psalms which proclaim God's unique power, declare man's utter dependence on him, and teach man that he must acknowledge this fact and adjust his life according to this insight.

6 The Vulgate follows closely the LXX: *intellectus, ad intellectum, pro maeleth intelligentiae* (Ps. 52).

7 It would be rewarding to examine Ps. 78 more in detail, for not only does its representation of Israel's past, its disbelief and continuous revolt remind us of the Sectarian portrait of Israel's history (as reviewed, for instance, in the first part of the Damascus Document), but also its vocabulary figures in the language of Qumran, to mention but a few: *bāsār hēmāb*; *bagg<sup>e</sup> dū*; *lō' bāt<sup>e</sup> ḥû*; *y<sup>e</sup> kazz<sup>e</sup> bû*; *lō' ḥe' emînu* *et 'el*; *b<sup>e</sup> niplā'ôt*; *lō' šām<sup>e</sup> rû* *et b<sup>e</sup> rû*.

14. The word *maskîl* appears in a similar sense already once within the context of a song or praise of God's powerful reign (Ps. 47:8): "...sing to our King; for the King of all the earth is God, sing a *maskîl*," that is, a proclamation of God's exclusive kingship which is at the same time a profession of faith and of loyalty.

It has often been pointed out<sup>8</sup> that 2 Chr. 30:22 may help us in an understanding of the term in this context. The chronicler records that the *maskîlîm* were a group of Levitic temple singers (note the foregoing verse 21!). We must remember that *mitwaddîm* (in verse 22) is resonant also with confession and repentance. This specification is followed by the three words *šēqel ṭôb laYHWH*, usually paraphrased (RSV, NEB): "who had shown good skill or true understanding in the service of the Lord." This translation does not do justice to the text, which says a little more, namely: "with great ardour, with special devotion to the Lord" (King Hezekiah had talked intimately with them, "to their heart").

2 Chr. 30:22, understood in this way, may indeed be of some help in finding the meaning of *maskîl* Ps. 47:8. The Targum translates the line *zamm<sup>erû</sup> maskîl* as follows: *šabbahû qodomôy b<sup>e</sup>šiklâ ṭābā*. *Maskîl* is taken here not as a connotation of some particular kind of Psalm, but the translator adverbializes the Hebrew expression: "Sing praises before Him with all devotion."

15. Nehemiah relates that the public reading of God's Torah by the Levites was done *m<sup>e</sup>pōrās w<sup>e</sup>šôm šēqel*, "clearly and with the right understanding (emphasis) and the people grasped the meaning while it was read" (Neh. 8:8). The elders and leaders of the people together with the priests and the Levites assembled with Ezra in order to study carefully the words of the Torah, *l<sup>e</sup>baškîl 'et dibrê hatôrāb*, 8:13). They did it in earnest and in the right spirit. We also learn from the book of Nehemiah in the great prayer of repentance, when all the people had been called together for the highest praise of the eternal God (9:5f.), that it is he who "has given his good spirit to enlighten them" (*l<sup>e</sup>baškîlām*, 9:20). This is an important statement.

Though we do find in the fourth benediction of the Shmoneh-Esreh a clear confession that God bestowed on man *dē'āb bînāb w<sup>e</sup>baškēl*, the Rabbis had not much room for any continued activity of the holy spirit after the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi<sup>9</sup>; but it played a considerable part in contemporary heretic circles, not only among the various Essenic groups but also among the early Christians.

16. The last and latest passages of the Old Testament which mention persons called *maskîlîm* need special attention. We find them in the last two chapters of the book of Daniel (11:33, 35; 12:3, 10). Who are these *maskîlîm*? They are distinct in quality and character from the common people (the *rabbîm*). They are endowed with deep insight and understanding of God's acts, especially of the coming mysterious happenings until the approaching of the end. Of course we can call them 'wise', but the translation of *maskîlê 'ām* (11:33), "those among the people who are wise" (RSV), or "the wise leaders of the nation" (NEB), is certainly insufficient; the older translation "they that understand among the people" (AV) was slightly better. They belong to the *yôd<sup>e</sup> 'ê 'elôhāyw*, to that section of the people who know their

8 Cf. Gesenius-Buhl, *Handwörterbuch* (1915), s.v. *maskîl*.

9 H. Kosmala, *Hebräer-Essener-Christen* (Leiden, 1959), 263f.

God (11:32); they will not sit still but become *maškilê 'ām* who will enlighten the *rabbīm* led astray by the *marši'ê b'erīt*. They will suffer hardships and death. The divine purpose of the misery which will come over them is to purify some of them, refine them and make them white until the time of the appointed end (verse 35). When the time of trouble is over, the nation will be saved, that is, every one whose name is written in the book (12:1f.). The *maškilīm*—including here all those who have been enlightened—will comprehend (verse 10).

We see that the meaning of *maškil* in the sense of 'teacher' or 'instructor' is already fully developed and in use in the last two chapters of the book of Daniel. The *maškil* who has *da'at 'elōbīm*, not just knowledge of God, but the deeper "Erkenntnis" of God, knows the mysteries of his wonderful deeds, knows that the *qēš (a'parīt yōmayyā')*,<sup>10</sup> with its punishment and reward, is coming, and therefore gives heed to the perfect way before God.

17. It is in this sense that the word *maškil* became a technical term in the Scriptures of Qumran, singling out the teacher who not only instructs the members and the novices of the sect in the knowledge of God and His ways with man but also teaches them the way of life which God wants them to pursue that they may escape the oncoming judgment.<sup>11</sup>

We may expect that the *maškil* has attained insight and wisdom, but the simple translation 'wise man' says too little and can be misleading as regards his standing and function within the community.

18. The tasks of the *maškil* are clearly laid out in the Manual of Discipline (S) and the Damascus Document (D). S III,13-IV,26, the catechism, is a short guidebook on the fundamental teachings concerning the requirements of that day; it is addressed to the *maškil* and is meant to be a help for his instruction. It is his obligation *l'ḥābîn ūl' lammēd* (those who are predestined among the children of man to become and be) the Sons of Light (S III,13; IV,22; X,26-XI,2), *l'ḥā'ir* man's heart (IV, 2), *l'ḥōkî'āḥ* they that have chosen the Way in the knowledge of truth and righteous justice (IX, 17f.; cf. D XII, 20ff.), *l'banḥōtām* in *dē'āb* (S IX, 18), in one word *l'baškilām* in the community in the mysteries of God's wonderful truth (IX, 18f.; cf. XI, 1 and D XIII, 7f.) and in the perfection of the Way (S IV, 22).

19. The *maškil* is a teacher strictly within the community; he is not a missionary. He must not argue or mix with those of the Pit; his teaching is arcane discipline and he must not reveal it to the evildoers, to those outside the community (S IX,16f.; cf. Amos 5:13!).

20. It goes without saying that the teaching must be accompanied and proved by an exemplary life. Who, then, could become a teacher? It was not enough to have the necessary mental and spiritual qualifications for his teaching office, he must also have distinguished himself by a perfect way of life.

There is a remarkable passage in the Epistle of James which may well have served as a warning against some who were aspiring to the office of a teacher.<sup>12</sup> James says on this point:

10 About these terms see Kosmala, "At the End of the Days," *ASTI 2* (1963), 27-37.

11 Attention to this fact and the complete dependence on the teaching of the Bible on *maškil* was drawn already in the writer's, *Hebräer*, 284. Three years later, Naphtali Wieder came to the same conclusion in his book, *The Judaean Scrolls and Karaism* (London, 1962), 104, 110-12.

12 Much of the thought as well as of the terminology of Qumran has been taken up by early (Jewish) Christianity. We cannot enlarge on this subject here. The reader is referred to the ample material collected in the writer's *Hebraer*, which consists of studies in the proto-history of early Christianity.

"Let not many of you become teachers (*didaskaloi*, there is no adequate Greek translation of the Hebrew term), for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness. For we all make many mistakes; and if any one makes no mistakes in what he says, he is a perfect man . . ." (3:1f.). "Who among you is wise (*sophos* = *ḥākām*) and understanding (*epistemon* = *maškîl*<sup>13</sup>)? By his good life let him show his works in the humility of wisdom (*en prauteti sophias* = '*anwat hokmāh*) . . ." 3:13f.). This kind of wisdom is not "earthly wisdom" (3:15), it is "wisdom from above" (3:17).

The *maškîl* of Qumran was bound to teach and answer in '*anāwāb* (S XI,1). He is endowed with *rû<sup>ah</sup>* '*anāwāb* and with *šēkēl ûbînāh w<sup>e</sup>ḥokmat g<sup>e</sup>bûrāh*, that is, with understanding, insight, and wisdom of (divine!) power (S IV,2f.).<sup>14</sup>

For this type of teacher none of the biblical concepts was so well suited as the term *maškîl*, none other was so intimately correlated with fear of God and divine wisdom that it could become an adequate name for the bearer of "supra-natural" wisdom.

21. The last sectarian group which adopted this term were the Karaites,<sup>15</sup> but the word was now applied to the whole group<sup>16</sup> in concordance with the passages in Dan. 11 and 12 where the word occurred only in the plural and finally (12:10) included all enlightened men whether they were official teachers or not. As *maškîlê 'am* (11:33), the Karaites considered themselves the teachers of Israel, which had gone astray, and they regarded it as their task to bring Israel back to the "true way of the Torah."

13 Cf. LXX to Neh. 8:8, 13; Dan. 1:4; 5:11.

14 Cf. Dan. 2:20, 23: *ḥokm<sup>e</sup>ta' ûg<sup>e</sup>bûr<sup>e</sup>tā' dî lēb ḥî'*; Mic. 3:8.

15 Wieder, *Judaean Scrolls*, 104-20; Leon Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology* (New Haven, 1952), 39, 330.

16 Anan, the founder of the sect, was called *rō'š hammaškîlîm* by his adherents.