

Wisdom: What Is It?

The subject I would like to talk about today is something that we take very much for granted in some ways. We think we have an understanding of it. The subject is wisdom. It's a matter that we discussed with the Young Adults in December in Ohio.

We all think we have an idea of what wisdom is. We are also aware, as God's Word tells us, that wisdom is a very important thing. In his writings, Solomon instructs us that wisdom has a very important place in our relationship with our Creator.

***Proverbs 9:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."***

The beginning, the starting point, of wisdom is linked to fear and respect of the Eternal God, understanding our relationship to Him, understanding who and what He is and understanding what in reality, He is offering us. In this verse Solomon gives us two very important words: "wisdom" on the one hand and "understanding" as well, juxtaposed to it. It is fascinating to look to see how we use those words in the Western world today.

Understanding

The word "understanding" is a word that came into the English language before the 12th century. It is very well established within the English language. We use it to provide the concept of a mental grasp or comprehension. "Comprehension" is a good word to describe our use and application of "understanding."

It is also described as: "the power of comprehending, especially the capacity to apprehend general relations and particulars" ... in other words, to put things together: "one and one equals two" in terms of simple arithmetic. We can understand that.

It also has an application to be "the power to make an experience intelligible by applying concepts and categories." It has other applications. People talk of "having an understanding," meaning that they get on well together. Many years ago, teenagers of the opposite sex would talk about having an "understanding." It related to a friendly or harmonious relationship. We find it is also "an agreement of opinion or feelings, adjustment of differences, and a mutual agreement, not formally entered into, but to some degree binding on each side."

Let's come back to the principle point we are looking at here. We are looking at the aspect of "comprehension," being able to put things together, general relations or particulars, making concepts and categories intelligible. That is very important in terms of understanding.

Wisdom

"Wisdom" is similarly old in terms of the language. It comes into Middle English from old English round about the 12th century. Notice the way in which "wisdom" is used. We find it is "accumulated philosophic or scientific learning."

Rather interestingly, the dictionary sums up "wisdom" as simply, "knowledge." You might say, "bare facts." It is also described as "the ability to discern inner qualities and relationships, insight ..." If someone is "insightful," we might say that person is "wise."

If a person has "good judgment" we might say they are wise as well. Another definition is, "a generally accepted belief." Here is an example the dictionary gives: "This particular person challenges what

has become accepted wisdom among historians." If something has become the generally accepted wisdom, everyone buys into it. Everyone uses and builds on the concept. So there are a number of uses here in terms of wisdom.

These are the ways WE use the terms "understanding" and "wisdom" in the 21st century. But the problem for us is that there is a vast "disconnect" between the way we use the term "wisdom" today and the way in which the Bible uses the term "wisdom." In fact, if we compare the usage of the English language with the Hebrew of the Old Testament, we find that the English "wisdom" better equates with what the Bible talks about as "understanding." So wisdom is in fact a step ABOVE what this world even defines as wisdom. As I say, we have a disconnect. What the English language refers to in terms of wisdom is not what the Bible talks about in terms of wisdom. That is an important point for us to bear very clearly in mind.

In the Bible, the Hebrew word *chokmah* (wisdom) has a greater depth of meaning than anything we have looked at in terms of the English language. It has a greater depth and a wide ranging application, much wider than we would necessarily think in terms of our English usage.

We are going to principally look at the aspect of wisdom in the Old Testament. As we do so, we will find that what the Hebrew Scriptures talk about in terms of wisdom is what the apostle Paul then plays off on in 1st Corinthians chapters one and two. It is what James then plays off on in James chapter three. If we don't understand what the Bible is talking about regarding wisdom as opposed to the way in which we receive these things, and if we use these terms as they are used in the world today, we fail to appreciate the depth of what either the apostle Paul or the apostle James is saying. What the apostle Paul says in his epistle is very, very important.

Let's look into the Old Testament. Let's consider this aspect of wisdom and let's "categorise" wisdom. That's a good way to understand wisdom. The ability to "categorise" was an important point of "understanding." So let's understand wisdom by categorising it. Let's look at some of the usages of wisdom throughout the Old Testament. These are both good and bad examples.

We are going to start somewhere where you would never think of "wisdom" having an application - because the very definition that is given of the application or the usage of wisdom in the English language is:

"... the combined knowledge and the combined corpus of philosophic and scientific data or knowledge."

But in terms of wisdom, the Bible starts with technical skills! That's not quite the wisdom that we expect!

You can be wise in terms of "technical skills." You can be wise in terms of "administrative skills." You can be wise in terms of "lifelong learning." A fourth area is "ethical and moral quality." Yes, we would clearly appreciate that being wisdom. The Bible also talks about wisdom in terms of "native wit" - native cunning, how people go about things. Let's look at some examples.

Technical Skills

We will start with the "technical skills." The technical skills that we need to look at are in terms of building the Tabernacle. The Eternal instructs Moses as to who is head up the design and the building of the Tabernacle.

Exodus 36:1 "And Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whom the LORD has put wisdom (chokmah) and understanding ...

Here are artisans with "wisdom."

1 ... to know how to do all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, shall do according to all that the LORD has commanded."

2 Then Moses called Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whose heart the

LORD had put wisdom (chokmah), everyone whose heart was stirred, to come and do the work.

They came and did the work of building the Tabernacle. A little later on in the account of building the Tabernacle, it says that even the women who wove the tapestries and the curtains did so with *chokmah*, with wisdom. So something as unimportant, something as pedestrian as we might think of weaving cloth, whether it be linen or some of the other materials like goats' hair that were used, was done so with wisdom.

So we are not necessarily talking about something that is cerebral, or that is confined for people with higher degrees. From time to time they might like to think that they have a "corner" on the wisdom market, but in reality, the wisdom that God is concerned about can be used by people who are doing what such people might consider relatively menial tasks.

Administrative Skills and Abilities

We have two examples of this in God's word: Joseph and Daniel.

Genesis 41 sets up an interesting contrast for us on the occasion in which Pharaoh had dreamed his dream of seven good cows and seven lean cows, and the seven good ears of corn and the seven wilted and lean ears of corn.

Genesis 41:8 Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men ...

We are not using the term *chokmah* here. We are using the adjective that is derived from it. These men are described as being wise. They are supposed to have what is considered *chokmah*.

8 ... And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh.

Then the butler suddenly remembered! "There's a guy in the dungeon who can interpret dreams. He interpreted my dream and the baker's dream. The baker got his comeuppance, and here I am again." So they sent and recovered Joseph from the dungeon:

14 Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh.

Coming before the Pharaoh in your dungeon attire, would not be highly acceptable! Once again the Pharaoh outlined the dreams to Joseph.

25 Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do:

He described the dreams: the seven good years followed by seven lean years.

32 "And the dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

33 "Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt.

Pharaoh has a problem - because he had just had some dumb "wise men" before him. They couldn't tell him the meaning of the dream! It is interesting to expand a little on the vibes going on in the court at this point in time! Where were all the wise men? They were probably outside the back door, out of earshot, hoping that they didn't get their heads removed from their bodies, or whatever the Egyptians did!

Joseph outlined for Pharaoh what needed to be done in the ensuing years so that sufficient grain was stored for the seven lean years.

37 So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants.

38 And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?"

39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you."

Joseph was made the Grand Vizier of Egypt: the Prime Minister of the land, as we might say in terms of the 21st century, under the Pharaoh. Here was an interesting play off between what the world considers wise on the one hand and the wisdom of God. Joseph was able to save Egypt, Canaan and the surrounding countries from famine. He was able to do that to great effect.

We find the same thing in Daniel chapter one. Daniel was among the bright young men from the court in Jerusalem who had been taken to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 1:3 Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, 4 young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans.

We don't have time to go through the rest of the story in terms of what Daniel and his three colleagues did to avoid the unclean and polluted food of the Babylonians. But eventually, at the end of the trial they came through with flying colours.

17 As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

18 Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.

19 Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king.

The summation was:

20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm.

As we proceed throughout the book of Daniel, we see that Daniel ends up being under the king. It was the same situation that Joseph found himself in. Because of his wisdom he ended up in the administrative offices of the Babylonian Empire and so did his colleagues. In the case of Daniel it happened not once, but several times. His wisdom gave him great administrative skills in terms of Babylon.

Lifelong Learning

The book of Proverbs speaks much about the aspect of wisdom. In Proverbs 4, Solomon is being instructed:

Proverbs 4:1 Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, And give attention to know understanding;

2 For I give you good doctrine (good teaching):

Do not forsake my law.

3 When I was my father's son,

Tender and the only one in the sight of my mother,

4 He also taught me, and said to me:

"Let your heart retain my words;

Keep my commands, and live.

5 Get wisdom! Get understanding!

Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.

6 Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you;

Love her, and she will keep you.

7 Wisdom is the principal thing;

Therefore get wisdom (chokmah).

And in all your getting, get understanding.

8 Exalt her, and she will promote you;

She will bring you honor, when you embrace her.

This father is talking about his life experience to his son. He is saying, "My parents gave me this instruction when I was a young child and I can see the value of it. Make this the pursuit of your life. Get wisdom, get understanding. Don't forget or turn away from the words of my mouth." Lifelong learning has to be summed up in wisdom, *chokmah*.

Ethical and Moral

We could look at various aspects of the book of Proverbs, but let's turn to another book which deals with wisdom: the book of Job. In the middle of Job's great discourse in Job 28, he starts to discuss the aspect of wisdom.

Job 28:20 "From where then does wisdom come?

And where is the place of understanding?

That's a good question for us which we will answer in due course.

21 It is hidden from the eyes of all living,

And concealed from the birds of the air.

People think they know about wisdom, but it is really concealed from them. They don't see it. They don't comprehend it.

22 Destruction and Death say,

'We have heard a report about it with our ears.'

23 God understands its way,

And He knows its place.

24 For He looks to the ends of the earth,

And sees under the whole heavens,

25 To establish a weight for the wind,

And apportion the waters by measure.

26 When He made a law for the rain,

And a path for the thunderbolt,

27 Then He saw wisdom (chokmah) and declared it;

He prepared it, indeed, He searched it out.

Wisdom is something of God's and God's alone, and as a result of searching it out ...

28 And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,

And to depart from evil is understanding.'"

Wisdom makes an ethical demand upon a person to live a particular way of life. It is associated with the way of life that we are to live, rather than just some abstract corpus of knowledge.

Another use of wisdom is that of:

Native Wit

We will go back to a Pharaoh again, a Pharaoh speaking to his advisors:

Exodus 1:10 (King James Version) Come on, let us deal wisely (the adverb form of chokmah) with them (these Children of Israel); lest they multiply ...

"... and become greater than us." The end result of his "dealing wisely" with the Children of Israel was infanticide! It wasn't quite fully infanticide, but it was infanticide relating to the male child. This is the first account of a form of genocide, of destroying a people.

The girls would then have been absorbed into the Egyptian society as concubines, mistresses, wives or whatever the case would have been, and the nation would have disappeared. A form of genocide is being played out here.

Looking at what we have in terms of the instances of wisdom, we can look at the source. We have God-given wisdom on the one hand. It can be technical, it can be administrative, it can be lifelong learning, and it can be ethical and moral.

On the other hand we have another form of "wisdom"; the end result is disastrous. The end thereof is death.

Let's define wisdom. From what the Scriptures tell us, it is very clear that wisdom comes from ONE source alone. It is the prerogative of God to provide wisdom. People may think they have wisdom. They may think that they have accumulated levels of understanding and insights and intuition or whatever it may be into a particular field of study in which they can classify themselves as wise.

But the Bible shows us that that isn't necessarily so! You only have wisdom if it is given from God. Wisdom must originate with God.

The next passage sets out very clearly that mankind, by themselves, don't understand wisdom.

1 Corinthians 1:19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;

23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,

29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.

30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God - and righteousness and sanctification and redemption -

31 that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

1 Corinthians 2:1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.

2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.

4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

6 However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,

What mankind classifies as wisdom is foolishness with God. God's wisdom is FAR beyond that of the comprehension of the human mind without God's Holy Spirit. Paul concludes this section by saying, "If they had known the true wisdom of God, they would not have crucified Jesus Christ."

8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

... because true wisdom brings about different results than the "native wit" that mankind thinks he might have.

On the one hand, the wisdom of God is productive and upbuilding. The wisdom of this world, ultimately speaking, ends up being destructive. It is going on a different path. In fact it is so diametrically opposite to the wisdom of God that it is not wisdom at all. It is foolishness! Yet we love to speak about "being wise."

In Proverbs 1:20-23 wisdom is set out in a fascinating way, one that we seldom think of. Solomon is really introducing the aspect of wisdom to us at this point. He said:

Proverbs 1:20 Wisdom calls aloud outside;

She raises her voice in the open squares.

21 She cries out in the chief concourses,

At the openings of the gates in the city

She speaks her words:

22 "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity?

For scorers delight in their scorning,

And fools hate knowledge.

23 Turn at my rebuke ...

Who is speaking? "Wisdom" is speaking to the people. She is saying, "Stop being simple. Turn at my rebuke ..."

23 ... Surely I will pour out my spirit on you;

I will make my words known to you.

Surprise, surprise: God's wisdom is linked with God's Holy Spirit! You have to have one to have an understanding of the other. Here, wisdom is offering to pour out God's Holy Spirit on these people so that they could understand. Now we can understand why the apostle Paul talks about the wisdom of this world being foolishness - because they don't compare. They are not based on the same definition or the same measurement. They are totally different.

Wisdom MUST originate from God. If it doesn't originate from God, it fails. The Pharaohs found that. Nebuchadnezzar found that. Babylonian leaders found that, so did the Medo-Persian leaders subsequently under Darius. It originates from God.

Does that mean we pray, "God, give me help to get through my exams. Enlarge my brain cells so that I can remember all the stuff so that I can get an 'A' in my exams"?

If we look carefully at the examples we have been through, there is another interesting phenomenon relating to wisdom that we seldom consider. Wisdom is given to accomplish the purposes of God! It is NOT for our own consumption! It is not to make us better or smarter than somebody else. It is to accomplish the very purposes of God.

Joseph was given wisdom to accomplish the purpose of God in saving the family alive, and not only his family but the nation of Egypt and other nations as well.

For what purpose were the technical skills given to Bezalel and Aholiab? It was to build the Tabernacle of God, the dwelling place of God.

For what purpose was wisdom was given to Solomon? It was to rule God's great people and to accomplish God's ends at that juncture of history. It was the same with Daniel. It is purely for the purposes of God.

We might say, "I'm not involved in building the Tabernacle, weaving cloth, working with gold or whatever the case may be. I'm not involved in that. I'm not involved in any administrative skill." But Solomon says:

***Proverbs 4:10 Hear, my son, and receive my sayings,
And the years of your life will be many.***

***11 I have taught you in the way of wisdom;
I have led you in right paths.***

***12 When you walk, your steps will not be hindered,
And when you run, you will not stumble.***

***13 Take firm hold of instruction, do not let go;
Keep her, for she is your life.***

Wisdom is to instruct our lives, to bring our lives into harmony with God's desire, irrespective of what other duties we might have. Each and every one of us is challenged in terms of this.

One person once made the comment to me that: "Wisdom is the ability to appreciate the end of a matter." We will come back and refine this a little more as we proceed.

Let's change pace. What else can we learn about wisdom? The first six verses of Proverbs chapter one give a prologue to the book. It sets up what the book is about. It gives us an insight into what we are going to have. These verses are very highly structured. They are not just casual "off-the-cuff" comments. Each and every one of the verses contains some very fundamental teaching to the whole aspect of wisdom. It starts in verse one with Solomon. Let's first consider some verses from the first book of Kings:

1 Kings 4:30 Thus Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt.

31 For he was wiser than all men ...

Why? It was because his wisdom had been given by God. His wasn't some testable thing that may have come out of Egyptian schools. This was God's gift to Solomon.

31 For he was wiser than all men - than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the surrounding nations.

32 He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five.

In the book of Proverbs, we have SOME of Solomon's proverbs.

Proverbs 1:1 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:

Solomon is the focus of the book. He wrote Proverbs. He had great wisdom given to him by God. Solomon appears a particular way, though. He appears as a son. In other words, somebody who had wisdom before him is GIVING Solomon this instruction. That is one way of reading it. Another way could be that Solomon is giving this instruction to a son. The book is structured on "a son." The reference "my son" appears 15 times in the first nine chapters. That is interesting repetition throughout the book.

As well as addressing a son, it also talks about the place of a king, the role of a king:

***Proverbs 8:15 By me kings reign,
And rulers decree justice.
16 By me princes rule, and nobles,
All the judges of the earth.***

If one looks very carefully throughout the first ten chapters, some 30 verses address the role of a king in relation to the wisdom that he should have.

Proverbs 1:1 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:

Solomon was a son, a king-to-be. The role of a king is expressed in a great number of ways in the book. The purpose of the book is then set out:

***2 To know wisdom and instruction,
To perceive the words of understanding,
3 To receive the instruction of wisdom,
Justice, judgment, and equity;***

The ideal addressee of the book of Proverbs is a young man. We have already mentioned the aspect of a son, but it is interesting how quickly it comes to then focus upon certain ethical or moral qualities that God is concerned about.

Verse three shows that the end result of learning these values is to have justice, judgment and equity. These are very important. I have spoken about those on other occasions. They become central to the whole aspect of wisdom because they are godly mindsets. If God gives us wisdom it is to accomplish and bring about those mindsets, those values in our life.

Verses four through six literally set out an invitation to pursue the objective given in verses two and three. It is not just addressed to Solomon. Solomon is a messenger whereby others are then invited into this pursuit, into this goal. All are invited:

4 To give prudence to the simple ...

Sometimes that can mean the unlearned rather than someone who is lacking a few connections in their brain. All are invited, the unlearned, the youth, even those who consider themselves as wise or people of understanding are invited.

***4 ... To the young man knowledge and discretion -
5 A wise man will hear and increase learning,
And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,
6 To understand a proverb and an enigma,
The words of the wise and their riddles.***

People who have a self-opinion of themselves are invited to come and learn. It is set out for us as a challenge. These were recorded for Solomon in the first place, but it was enlarged to encompass all of mankind, all of humanity - including you and me. We are invited into this lesson that Solomon was learning or that he was conveying to his son.

Verse seven starts into the study of wisdom and understanding:

***7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction.***

Fools are people who don't have true values. They despise wisdom and instruction. If we have the fear of the Eternal, if we have the right respect of God, if we understand our position and juxtaposition to God, then we have the right starting premise.

Some questions are raised.

- Why was it written to a son or Solomon?
- What is the application to us today?
- In this society we might ask, of what value is the book of Proverbs to women? "It talks to men all the time."

Let's define the aspect of wisdom a little more fully. To do so I would like to take you to the end of the book of Proverbs, to the first verses of the last two chapters.

***Proverbs 30:1 (New Living Translation) The message of Agur son of Jakeh.
An oracle. I am weary, O God; I am weary and worn out, O God.***

"It's been a hard week! I need a Sabbath to rest."

***Proverbs 31:1 (New American Standard Version) The words of King Lemuel, the oracle
which his mother taught him:***

These two verses have the word "oracle" in common. More modern translations may use other words. What do they mean by an "oracle" here? The term that is translated "oracle" comes from the Hebrew *massa* which means literally, "a recapping of what has gone before." "Let's put it all together."

Oftentimes this word was translated as "a burden" because in certain circumstances we are dealing with a tangible commodity. We ARE talking about a burden! The book of Numbers sets out which family of the Levites had to carry the "burden" of the Tabernacle. They had to carry the curtains. They had to carry the uprights, etc, or they were given carts on which to carry the "burdens."

But here, this word is being used in another way.

It has a relationship to "burden." What really is the "weight" that we have been talking about? Let's put it together. Let's consider it. Let's put everything in context and consider what we are being told here. In doing so I would like you to look at Proverbs chapter 31 because it helps us understand what wisdom is all about. We have already looked at verse one. In verses two through nine there is a summary of the book. It starts off by putting the "son" in context. We are all "self-made men." Fiction! Because, as the mother said:

***Proverbs 31:2 What, my son?
And what, son of my womb?
And what, son of my vows?***

"You think you are something? But half a moment: I carried you for nine months and I did so because of a marriage I had entered into. You are the product of my body and of your father's body. You don't live to yourself. Get that in context."

Let's put ourselves in context. We don't live of and by and to ourselves. We are the result of something else. The mother tells the king, King Lemuel, "Son, remember who you are!"

Men don't normally like to think about such things! They like to think of who they are NOW, rather than what they were beforehand. After having discussed who we are, the mother then goes on to describe what is important to the Eternal. What is important for a king? She tells him:

***3 Do not give your strength to women,
Nor your ways to that which destroys kings.***

When I grew up the adage was, "Fast women, slow horses and cars were the road to disillusion and to

a useless life." Things change. I guess today has another title as to what it is that can lead to destruction in a person's life. It may be drugs or various things of that nature. The mother is telling him:

***3 Do not give your strength to women,
Nor your ways to that which destroys kings.
4 It is not for kings, O Lemuel,
It is not for kings to drink wine,
Nor for princes intoxicating drink;***

That is not what life is about for a person who has rulership. Rather, she says, don't get involved in that ...

***5 Lest they drink and forget the law,
And pervert the justice of all the afflicted.***

It's not that drinking is necessarily wrong in and by itself. But, so often a person who has position, wealth, might and power, becomes a consumer in the ultimate sense of the word. Their life is concerned with what they can consume. She said, "Lemuel, that's not what your life is about. Your life is about giving justice to the afflicted!"

The justice, judgment and equity that Solomon told us about in Proverbs 1:4 comes back to remind us again at the end. "If you are going to be this type of king, you are going to have priorities! You are going to have priorities of being concerned about the things of God - not the things of physical appetite." She is not saying that you can't use those in a proper manner. But what is of importance to God is righteousness, justice and equity

In these verses there is an interesting parallel with the instructions that are set out in Deuteronomy 17 in terms of kings. What are the priorities of a king? It should not be the collection of great wealth or great armies! It should be to absorb himself in the law of God and to understand the consequences of it: to lead, strengthen and build people as a result.

There is an interesting set up in the first nine verses of Proverbs 31 in terms of what is really involved for a king.

***8 Open your mouth for the speechless,
In the cause of all who are appointed to die.
9 Open your mouth, judge righteously,
And plead the cause of the poor and needy.***

So very categorically we return to:

Proverbs 1:3 ... Justice, judgment, and equity;

The same expressions are being used in the final chapter. In the rest of Proverbs 31, there is an interesting situation. The body of the book relates principally to "a man" or "a son." The final section applies to a woman! It is an interesting contrast.

I would suggest to you that the body of the book relates to all who want to be a "son of God." Do you want to be a son of God? I hope so. The book of Proverbs is written to anyone who would be a son of God.

As sons of God, we are to become kings and rulers! There is no deviation or dichotomy between the two sections of this book. The latter section talks about the qualities of a virtuous woman: the qualities of justice, judgment and equity in their own way.

We don't have time to spend any more time on Proverbs 31, but what is talked about provides us with a little bit of an insight so that we can define wisdom a little more fully.

Let's come back. We looked at these purposes before in defining wisdom. It has to originate from God. It must be for the purposes of God and, as a colleague once told me, "Wisdom is being able to appreciate the end of the matter."

What is the end of my life? What is the end of your life? It is to be part of the Family of God! Wisdom is given to each and everyone of us to help us prepare for the future, for our role in the Kingdom of God! It is accessible for us so that we can prepare our lives.

The flip side to that is that if we are not preparing our lives for the Kingdom of God, we may find ourselves destroying our lives. That's the contrast.

Let's ask another question: what about Eve? Didn't she want wisdom?

Genesis 3:6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was supposed to make them wise! Really? "Wise" does not equal "wise." Translators play tricks on us from time to time. Genesis chapter three is not talking about the wisdom of God. It is not talking about *chokmah*. It is talking about another Hebrew word, *sakal* which means "to have insight, to be instructed, to be smart."

Hmm! Maybe we need to change the translation of Genesis 3:6 because it is not talking about the wisdom of God in any way whatsoever. That is not the subject matter of the occasion. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil cannot make us wise! Only the Eternal can give us wisdom.

Let's close by turning to the book of James. James contrasts the wisdom of this world, what mankind considers wisdom, with the wisdom of God. He said:

James 3:15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.

... talking about the type of wisdom that this world has, that leads to envy, self-seeking and boasting.

16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

To my mind, one of the most beautiful Scriptures in the whole Bible is the next verse. It sums things up and puts them in context for us.

17 But the wisdom that is from above ...

... the true wisdom that we are to seek, that Solomon waxed eloquent about in the book of Proverbs, that David spoke of in the book of Psalms, that Joseph, Daniel, Solomon Bezalel, Aholiab and those involved in the building of the Tabernacle had! It was the wisdom that both Paul and James speak about. The wisdom that is from above has certain qualities to it. It can be identified!

17 ... is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Once again, James is bringing the aspect of righteousness and wisdom together. It's very easy for us to think, "Well, wisdom for those involved in building the Tabernacle!"

But aren't we all? I remember years ago when we had a printing press, there were people who would work 24-hours a day "to do the work." I must say that they did it without wisdom because their own personal lives were a travesty to the God who called them. They would have been better off working eight hours and going home and taking care of their wives and families, and having some of the REAL wisdom that came from above.

I am not saying that you shouldn't work overtime in any way whatsoever. I think in those days people sometimes used the idea of "doing the work" or "building the Tabernacle" or whatever the case may be as an excuse to avoid the REAL responsibilities they had of building godly character within their own lives. They thought they could avoid it. We can't! It's one of the lessons that we have.

We are ALL involved in the work. Your life and your relationships, my life and my relationships, are all part of doing God's work. God wants to see that work done in each and every one of our lives. He will provide the wisdom. He offers it to us. It is available to all of us.

It is very appropriate for us when we consider the aspect of the giving of God's Holy Spirit. Each year when we finish keeping the Days of Unleavened Bread, do we then forget about it, or do we continue to look at our lives, and see what we need to change?

Do you KNOW what you need to change? You and I need wisdom to see our life from a godly perspective, so that we can have the influence of God's Holy Spirit to change it, to change what God doesn't like. Each one of us would benefit from having that wisdom, would we not? Is there anyone here who would say their lives would not benefit from having more of this wisdom that is from above?

It is given to bring about God's purposes in our lives. It is:

17 ... pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

It's available to us. In fact, James has already told us that if we lack wisdom, all we have to do is ask:

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God ...

All we have to do is ask, because God will give it to us liberally. He doesn't upbraid. He will give us His wisdom to bring about the changes in our lives just as surely as He gave it to Joseph to bring about the salvation of Egypt and Israel, just as surely as He gave it to Bezalel and Aholiab, and as He gave it to all the others He has given it to.

He will give it to you and me just as He gave it to Paul, just as He gave it to James, just as He gave it to Peter and John, just as He gave it to all of the apostles - because He desires to give it to us! It is part of His plan. It is part of His purpose. That is what He wants us to participate in as a son of His!

... Peter Nathan
03 May 08

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