

Survey of the Bible part 94 Fear of the Lord, beginning of Wisdom

As we saw last week the book of Proverbs is a book of the compiled wise sayings of a number of people, including Solomon. And Solomon points this out in the beginning verses of chapter one.

Proverbs 1:5-6 ⁵ A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, ⁶ To understand a proverb and a figure, The words of the wise and their riddles.

As I mentioned last week the Hebrew word wise is in the plural and intimates “wise one’s.” And this is why the NJB puts it this way.

^{NJB} **Proverbs 1:6** for perceiving the meaning of proverbs and obscure sayings, the sayings of the sages and their riddles.

And as we also saw last week Solomon makes note of how he was responsible for taking these wise sayings of these sages or wise one’s and compiling them in a way where the Lord would use them for our instruction and edification.

Ecclesiastes 12:6-11 ⁶ *Remember Him* before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; ⁷ then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. ⁸ "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity!" ⁹ In addition to being a wise man, *the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs.* ¹⁰ The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly. ¹¹ *The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd.*

The one Shepherd to whom we look is the Great Shepherd of the sheep, all of God’s chosen from the beginning of time. And it is this wise shepherd to whom we look for wisdom to walk in a way that brings Him glory.

1 Corinthians 1:22-24 ²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to

Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but *to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God personified and as we seek Him we seek true wisdom as opposed to the wisdom of the world, which Paul also points out in 1Cor.

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 ⁴ and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

The supernatural wisdom with which Solomon was blessed by God to rule His people still pales in comparison to the wisdom we are given in Christ as He opens our eyes to the truth of who God is and who we are; people in a desperate situation, in need of a Savior, found only in Christ.

2 Timothy 3:14-15 ¹⁴ You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

This is true spiritual wisdom in which we are to grow up in Christ.

Colossians 1:9-10 ⁹ For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ *so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord*, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and *increasing in the knowledge of God*;

And it is this wisdom we are commanded to seek from God on a daily basis, knowing that He will hear our prayer.

James 1:5 ⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and ¹without reproach, and ^bit will be given to him.

The other thing we saw last week was that the wisdom that Solomon compiles is a wisdom, if properly understood, that will lead us to Christ because even if we gain all of the wisdom of the world and employ it in leading a good life, it still comes infinitely short of its intended goal and at that point becomes nothing but

vanity. And this is precisely what Solomon has in mind when writing the next book that comes on the heels of Proverbs and that is Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 ^{NAU} The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. ² "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

So, with this recap let's push through this book called Proverbs.

The book can be divided up into at least seven main sections.

Section 1 discusses fearing God as the beginning of understanding (Prov. 1:7 to 9:18).

Section 2 contains the Proverbs of Solomon (Prov. 10:1 to 22:16).

Section 3 has words of the wise (Prov. 22:17 to 24:22).

The fourth section has more statements from those considered wise (Prov. 24:23 to verse 34).

The fifth section houses Solomon's wisdom copied by the men of Judah's King Hezekiah (Prov. 25:1 to 29:27).

The sixth section showcases wisdom from Agur son of Jakeh (Prov. 30).

The seventh and final section highlights wise words from King Lemuel (Proverbs 31).

As with the psalms we'll take a slice of each of the different sections as we move through Proverbs. So, let's start with section one, fearing God as the beginning of understanding.

Proverbs 1:7 ⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The companion verse found toward the end of the first section is similar.

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

In both of these verses the fear of the Lord is essential in having a proper concept of knowledge, wisdom and understanding.

The question is, what is the fear of the Lord?

Who has a fear of the Lord?

No one.

Romans 3:10-18 ¹⁰ as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." ¹³ "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; ¹⁴ "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS"; ¹⁵ "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, ¹⁶ DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, ¹⁷ AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." ¹⁸ "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."

So, if no one has a fear of the Lord and yet without such fear we will never know wisdom that leads to life found in the Messiah, we must get this fear or humbling reverence and proper understanding of who God is and what He requires.

But on our own we can't obtain it, therefore, we must have it given to us as a gift, and that is precisely what God has done.

Ephesians 2:8-9 ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

The way this gift from God is employed is by God Himself graciously changing the hearts of those He has chosen to go from darkness to light.

Ezekiel 11:19-20 ⁹ "And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, ²⁰ that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.

Ezekiel 36:26-28 ²⁶ "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you

will be careful to observe My ordinances. ²⁸ "You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.

In both of these passages God is speaking to a remnant that He calls out and gives a supernatural wisdom that leads to life as He takes them from death and darkness, characterized by a heart of stone, and leads them to living waters as He alone gives them a new life, characterized by a new heart of flesh.

It is entirely a work of God. And Solomon understood this because he understood the deadness of the heart outside of a supernatural work of the heart by God.

Proverbs 1:24-33 ²⁴ "Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention; ²⁵ And you neglected all my counsel And did not want my reproof; ²⁶ I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, ²⁷ When your dread comes like a storm And your calamity comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. ²⁸ "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently but they will not find me, ²⁹ *Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the LORD.* ³⁰ *"They would not accept my counsel, They spurned all my reproof.* ³¹ *"So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way And be satiated with their own devices.* ³² "For the waywardness of the naive will kill them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them. ³³ "But he who listens to me shall live securely And will be at ease from the dread of evil."

Again notice that the fear of the Lord is totally absent from those who call on God in verse 28. God does not listen to them because they will not listen to God, they only want their distress to go away as they call on Him.

They hate knowledge.

Does that mean that people don't want to gain knowledge?

No, people are hard-wired by God to gain knowledge; knowledge of their environment, knowledge of their roles in life, knowledge of other people around them. People always desire knowledge.

But is that the kind of knowledge that Solomon is talking about?

No. Solomon is addressing the nation of Israel in particular. The nation of Israel is that called out group of people that, since its inception, was shown to be a chosen people who represents all of God's chosen throughout time.

Israel, as a nation, never sought out God, instead God sought them out. Why?

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 ⁷ "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸ but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

God had planned from eternity past to choose and redeem a people for Himself and He also ordained the means by which that would happen.

The means included introducing into the world of men a man, born of a woman who would accomplish the Father's will in bringing that people to Himself. This was the promise to Adam and Eve. This would also include bringing this promised Messiah through a particular people called Israel.

This was the promise to Abraham, who was not an Israelite, but a Hebrew. God made this promise and swore to be faithful to that promise.

Genesis 12:1-2 ^{NAU} Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; ² And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing;

God promised one man, who had no children and could have no children to Sarah, that he would be a great nation. Well, we know that God was faithful to that promise in giving Abraham and Sarah, Isaac.

The promise would continue from Isaac to Jacob, through whom the nation of Israel would be born. And so, in Deuteronomy 7:7-8 God simply reminds the people that they were not looking to be a nation for God, but because of the promise He made to Abraham the faithful Lord was fulfilling His promise and His will to create a

people who would represent Him in this world. And so, He placed His love upon them.

But it turns out that most of Israel did not fear God or obey Him and we see this early on in their coming out of Egypt as they were willing to serve and bow to other gods, including the golden calf.

It was always a remnant that God called out from among the nation of Israel who were blessed with such a fear as their stony hearts were replaced with a heart of flesh by God Himself.

In fact, Israel as a nation continued to show itself to be a people who desired neither a fear of God or to walk in His ways. And because they continued to whore after other gods, the Lord finally wrote them a certificate of divorce.

Jeremiah 3:8-12 ⁸ "And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also. ⁹ "Because of the lightness of her harlotry, she polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. ¹⁰ "Yet in spite of all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather in deception," declares the LORD. ¹¹ And the LORD said to me, "Faithless Israel has proved herself more righteous than treacherous Judah. ¹² "Go and proclaim these words toward the north and say, 'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD; 'I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious,' declares the LORD; 'I will not be angry forever.

God divorced the nation of Israel long ago, as the people who would faithfully represent Him. And we see this clearly when the Jews of Christ's day try to make the case that simply because Abraham was their physical descendant that this made them God's people with God as their father.

John 8:42-44 ⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. ⁴³ "Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. ⁴⁴ "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

But what about the statement in Jeremiah where God says, ¹² "Go and proclaim these words toward the north and say, 'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD; 'I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious,' declares the LORD; 'I will not be angry forever.

Doesn't this tell us that God will one day restore the nation of Israel? Not at all. The nation of Israel has been divorced from God, but God does promise a remnant known as the Israel of God from every tribe, tongue and nation.

But doesn't Paul tell us that the nation of Israel will be grafted back in to the true vine?

Romans 11:17-27 ¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you. ¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; ²¹ for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. ²² Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³ And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural *branches* be grafted into their own olive tree? ²⁵ For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery-- so that you will not be wise in your own estimation-- that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; ²⁶ and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." ²⁷ "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

The olive tree that Paul speaks of is the life tree of God Himself in which God places both Jew and Gentile. Paul tells us that the reason for the removal of some of the branches, that is, the Jews, is so that the Gentiles might be grafted in. But Paul says that a partial

hardening has happened to Israel, but that some of the Jews will be grafted back into the olive tree, but only on one condition.

Does anyone see it in verse 23?

And then he says, and so all Israel will be saved. He's not talking about the nation of Israel, the context is clear that he is talking about both Jew and Gentiles being grafted into the life which only Christ can supply. All Israel is all of God's people, both Jew and Gentile.

Ephesians 2:11-16 ¹¹ Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands-- ¹² *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

Here is wisdom. God has always had a people for Himself and the eternal plan was for those people to be from both Jews and Gentiles to be one people forever under His Lordship.

And by the way, the same promise of cutting off from the vine or the olive tree remains true for the church today. God has promised that there will be an apostasy among those who are called God's people just as with Israel of old. The church will be judged as we are told that judgment begins with the household of God.

Those who prove themselves to be wolves in sheep's clothing or tares among the wheat will be cut off.

Proverbs 2:21-22 ²¹ For the upright will live in the land And the blameless will remain in it; ²² But the wicked will be cut off from the land And the treacherous will be uprooted from it.

There are many incredible proverbs that continue this theme of the fear of the Lord being the beginning of wisdom, but we'll end with this tonight.

Proverbs 3:1-8 ^{NAU} My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; ² For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you. ³ Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man. ⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. ⁸ It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones.