

September 22, 2019

Lesson 4: God's First Creation

Scripture: Proverbs 8:1-3, 22-32

Context:

The next focus on God moves to the book of Proverbs. The purpose statement of the lesson is to recognize the importance of wisdom in God's creation. From the lesson we will learn about how to recognize wisdom in our lives and how it ties to being a gift from God.

The book of Proverbs is a part of the Old Testament. It is known as part of "wisdom literature," and focuses on concern with the present and the human condition.¹ It is difficult to know who wrote the book of Proverbs as well as the other "wisdom literature" books of the Bible such as Job and Ecclesiastes. Much of the literature is attributed to Solomon and his court as Solomon was known for his wisdom and discernment.² Large pieces of the book of Proverbs refer to Solomon as well as other royal characters from that era.

The book of Proverbs is known as an anthology. It is a collection of proverbs, which are statements that convey a religious truth or give insight into the human experience.³ The proverbs have different origins. Some may have originated in agrarian towns and villages, with references to agricultural activities such as plowing, planting, and harvesting.⁴ Most of the proverbs though refer to the lives of the wealthy elite and especially the manners of the royal court.⁵ These proverbs also testify to the ideals of ancient Israelite law and the teachings of the prophets concerning social justice.⁶ The book helps us understand the perspectives and values of the ancient people.

The figure we meet in today's part of Proverbs is the "Woman Wisdom," who is found throughout chapters one and nine. Scholars are in disagreement about her status. For many, she is a hypostasis, a divinized personification of an abstract quality, like Victory of Justice.⁷ Others have speculated that she has qualities that some would have

¹ Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, (Oxford: University Press, 2011), 462.

² Ibid., 463.

³ Ibid., 464.

⁴ Ibid., 464.

⁵ Ibid., 464.

⁶ Ibid., 465.

⁷ Ibid., 466.

tied her to being a goddess, God's female consort.⁸ Whatever the interpretation, the reference to her is to encourage the people to see that God has given wisdom to guide humans in their lives.

Application

What comes to the mind when you hear the word "wisdom?" For me, I have several images that flash in my head alongside Lady Wisdom. I think of books and wide libraries. I consider the character Albus Dumbledore from the Harry Potter series, peering over his glasses with his all knowing eyes. I see cups of tea or coffee next to people I consider "wise." I think about lists of ideas with check marks next to them and lines connecting thoughts together.

According to the scripture passage of today's lesson, wisdom is a gift from God that all of us can receive. As Lady Wisdom wanders around, she calls out to those who will respond to her and they turn to hear her voice and receive direction for their lives. Wisdom is a gift that is timeless, and accessible to all those who desire or want it.

There is a difference between wisdom and knowledge. Knowledge is having a set of information at one's fingertips and being able to articulate that information so that someone understands it. Wisdom is having information and being able to discern what to do with the information, if anything at all.

Some of the places that we experience wisdom can come during times of adversity. I have often turned to people who have had more experience with life when there seem to be rough times or when there needs to be discernment about next steps. Usually, wisdom is able to make sense of issues that are going on and how to do the right thing even if there is messiness or uncertainty.

Wisdom is also something that can be difficult for us even if we seek it. In the book of Proverbs, Lady Wisdom roams around, calling out to people. However, the counsel she gives or provides is not always fun or joyful. In fact, it may even push people out of their comfort zone or lead them to a place where they have to make hard decisions.

Today's world and our personal lives could probably stand to receive a good deal of wisdom. I think if Lady Wisdom were to wander around today, I can imagine that her counsel would be well received by some, and others would hide or dismiss her.

Wisdom is the voice that reminds us in times of anxiety or uncertainty that the best route to go is to strive not to be anxious and not be driven by the "what-ifs" of the world. Wisdom is the voice that tells us to let go of the toxic relationship even if it means that some of the crutches we have will be taken away. Wisdom is the voice that reminds us that all good things will come in due time and that instant gratification doesn't always guarantee us joy. Wisdom is the voice that asks us if we are doing the right thing or functioning on survival and conflict avoidance mode.

Hopefully along the way we can find the voice of wisdom in different places. It may come in the morning devotion where we have a scripture that shouts to us the words we need to hear about a situation in our lives. Wisdom may come in the quiet of the car ride to work as we mull over a personal relationship issue that needs to be addressed. Wisdom may pop up by sitting with an older (or even younger) person who we visit and we realize that they have a truth to share with us that is meant for good.

⁸ Ibid., 466.

What is a situation where you need wisdom and discernment? How do you understand the difference between knowledge and wisdom? Who are people that you can turn to who are wise and will give you good counsel? What spiritual disciplines do you feel God gives to you to help your quest for wisdom?

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